WITHDRAWN FOR DISCARD

THE TANGLE-COATED HORSE

OTHER BOOKS BY

ELLA YOUNG

Celtic Wonder-Tales

The Wonder-Smith and His Son

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THE TANGLE-COATED HORSE

AND OTHER TALES

EPISODES FROM THE FIONN SAGA

BY

ELLA YOUNG

ILLUSTRATED BY

VERA BOCK

WITHDRAWN FOR DISCARD

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YOUNG
THE TANGLE-COATED HORSE

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To

JOSEPH McGARRITY

WHO HAS TAKEN FIONN FOR EXEMPLAR

ORIGINALS of these stories will be found in Silva Gaedelica (Standish Hayes O'Grady); Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts (Kennedy); Leabhar na Feinne (MacInnis); The Red Woman (The Shining Beast) in Sgealuidhe Gaedhealach (Dr. Douglas Hyde); Fionn and the Phantoms (The House in the Valley) in Revue Celtique (Kuno Meyer); The Daughter of King Under Wave in Popular Tales of the Western Highlands (Campbell). In some instances the versions followed are from Lady Gregory's book: "Gods and Fighting Men."

FOREWORD

THE FIONN SAGA is one of the oldest and strangest of Gaelic Sagas: it is also one of the best-remembered, for to this day in Gaelic-speaking Scotland and in every part of Ireland Finn McCool is a household name. If there is a gulch anywhere he has leaped over it; if there is a huge stone it is one that he cast once-upon-a-time as a shoulder-stone; if there is a gap in a mountain-crest he has lifted the bit from it. He is giant-big in the minds of the old folk and the children. Story-tellers can recite long poems in intricate metre all about Fionn and Usheen and Keeltya and the others.

In places — it is a grief to say it — the folk have forgotten Cu-Chulainn, they could not even tell you the name of the Sun-God, Lugh the Long-Handed, but they would always know a story or two about Fionn. There is many an American child I am sure who knows a story or two also: I hope a few more will be glad to hear of him in this book.

21 November 1928
Halcyon, California

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THE TANGLE-COATED HORSE

A NIGHT OF THE NIGHTS

A SMALL boy sat under an oak tree in a forest of oaks. Sunburnt of face and body he was for his deerskin tunic covered little of him. His blue eyes had a steady look in them like the eyes of a hawk and his thick mane of hair was a bright red-gold. He was pounding a deerskin with a smooth rounded stone to soften it: mayhap for sake of a tunic, or a pair of thonged shoes. He was alert as a forest creature — that child — for the snapping of a twig brought him to his feet, listening like a fawn. A tall woman with a deeply lined face and black hair that had many a strand of gray in it was coming through the trees:

"Fionn," she said, "my Treasure, is the skin a strong one?"

"It is, Bovemall," said the boy, "I have pounded it as you taught me: and softened it as well with my fingers."

"Good at skin-craft you are," said the woman, "you will know more things than your father knew, when you come to be chieftain of Clann Bassna."

"He had hounds to take the deer for him, and house-thralls to soften the skins," said the boy. "He would know how to ride a proud horse. He had craft of a swordsman. Mayhap I will come by that and have my woodcraft to throw in with it."

"Mayhap you will," said the woman going to a little near-by clearing where the ashes of a fire were. She set to kindling a flame; and another woman — Liath her comrade — old like herself, came to help her.

Fionn continued to soften his deerskin, and his thoughts ran on the knowledge he had. He was a creature of the forest. He counted time by the blossoming and withering of the moon and by the burgeoning of leaves and their fluttering fall, pencilled and painted for their last dance with the wind. He knew how to track the forest creatures; and how to stand still suddenly, like a tree or a stone, the way they did. He knew how to make friends with them too. Bovemall had taught him that. And as he pounded his deerskin his thoughts went back to the day when she had shown him how to make friends with the wolves. She sat in a green place far in the heart of the forest. The trees stood in a circle about that green place and the wind went from tree-top to tree-top but did not come down to play in the grass. Open sky was above it. Bovemall made Fionn sit beside her. Then she began a low crooning song, a song without words in it. She clapped her hands together as she sang and swayed with the rhythm of her singing. Fionn was hard set to keep awake, till the sudden cry of a wolf startled sleep from him — a second wolf answered; then another, and another, till the forest was alive with voices. Then came pattering feet, and in the circle of the tree Fionn could see flashing

eyes and the glint of white fangs and gray bodies slipping between the tree-trunks. Fionn did not dare to speak. Bovemall went on singing, and in the shadow of the forest those gray bodies slipped from tree-trunk to tree-trunk. They were silent but their feet made a padding rhythmic sound. Suddenly Bovemall stopped singing. She stood erect:

" Let the king of the wolves come hither," she said.

A great gray beast loped into the open space. He looked at Fionn, and the circle of trees, and his followers slipping from shadow to shadow, and at Bovemall — all in one glance — without seeming to look at anything.

" King of the wolves," said Bovemall, " this child is the chief of Clann Bassna. To-day he is little and weak, but some day he will be strong and a great hunter able to smite your people or let them slip by unharmed. The forest protects him. He has earth-luck, and luck out of faery-land. To-day he would give friendship to you in exchange for your friendship."

Three times in token of friendship the great gray beast had circled Fionn, and three times in token of good-fellowship Fionn had circled the wolf: going carefully from left to right. Then Bovemall had poured between them a gift of wine and honey and milk, and called on the earth to witness — and on running water and sun and moon and wind — and so the pact was established. Fionn had kept that friendship. So had the wolves.

Bovemall had shown him many things. She had shown him how to coax the wind from its path in the tree-tops down to their fire of logs where it made patterns in the white wood ash: or lifted the Autumn leaves in a scarlet and golden swirl. Bovemall herself could call the wind

out of a clear sky and send it crashing and hurtling through the forest. She could tame it at its fiercest, lulling it to sleep with softly spoken words. She could send it to shepherd the rain clouds, herding them to thirsty places: or withholding them. It was Bovemall who taught Fionn how to greet the water; running water that danced in streams and rivers; lake-water that moved silently among reeds and stony places, or lay darkly in the mountain-hollows. Fionn had seen the spirit of the water glitter like a dragon myriad-scaled and moving joyously; he had seen it laugh and blow a thousand colors from its lips, and he had laughed in answer calling out childish endearments to it; names that no one knew but himself.

Fionn thought of these things, and things kin to them, while he pounded his deerskin. He pounded it till the light slipped away and darkness like a quiet-footed army took the forest. Then Fionn folded his deerskin and laid it at the foot of the oak tree. He went to the fire in the clearing.

"Bovemall," he said, "is it likely that Moorna my mother will come hither on a day of these days?"

"There is no likelihood of her coming at all," said Bovemall. "Is it not enough that you saw her when the first buds reddened the forest, she that had to slip like a fox through watching hounds to visit you: is it likely that the king she wedded will give her leave a second time to risk the marshes and stony places — and pitfalls in the murk of moonless nights?"

"She came to me in a dream last night, Bovemall. Her face was very white: it may be that she is dead."

"That is a fool's thought. Moorna cannot die. She is of the Faery Folk and will go back to them when the time

comes without a wrinkle in her fairness or a gray hair in the pride of her gold."

"She had tears in her eyes in my dream," said Fionn.

"Belike she had," cried Liath. "It's little she thought when she left the Plain of Honey to wed with Uail your father that had the look of a god on him, how soon she would be keening lost battles and her dead man!"

"Well," said Bovemall, "if the light in Aloon is quenched the candles are lit elsewhere for her. The king she has now spreads his share of the world under her feet."

"Are all the lights quenched indeed in Aloon?" asked Fionn. "You said it was the palace of a thousand candles."

"How can I tell?" said Bovemall. "It's Goll that has it now and its thousand candles if he cares to set flame to them; Goll that slew your father before you ever saw the light of day; Goll that wasted the Clann Bassna and left us without a roof to shelter us other than the branchy forest, and we going from lair to lair in it hunted and baited like badgers."

"When I am man-grown," said Fionn, "I will win back what my father had: it will be a hard day for Goll that day. I will kindle fire in Aloon and set the harpers playing."

"The Lordship of the Fianna of Ireland: that is what Uail had, and the friendship of the High King. It is not a vaunt or two that will win it, Fionn my Treasure."

"Don't be putting a hare's heart in the boy with ill-omened speech," said Liath. "It may be that the Salmon of Knowledge that winnows greenness to the earth, and life to every living creature, will winnow luck to Fionn."

"Liath," said Fionn, "I had Bovemall's word that she

would tell me of that Salmon when the deerskin was softened. It is softened to-night: Bovemall, will you tell me of the Salmon? "

" I will indeed, my Golden Hawk: but first I must put the deer-meat under power of the embers."

She swept the burning flakes of wood from a hollow place by the fire; a hollow place lined with flat stones that were almost red-hot. She wrapped a piece of venison in a barth of sharptasting herbs, and placed it on the hot stones. Then she drew flaming embers over the hollow place.

" Soon you will have something to put your teeth in, Fionn," said Bovemall, " and now sit with your back to the big oak tree, for this is a long story, and I will tell you of the Pool of Wisdom that some call the Well of Knowledge; and of the Salmon that swims there."

Fionn sat with his back to the oak tree: and with the murmur of its leaves and the sound of the forest about them Bovemall told him of the Well of Knowledge:

" In the Heaven-World there is a Fountain that leaps up like a great feathered plume, like a tower of crystal, and falls back into itself and spreads and widens — deep; and deep; and deep — into a pool of delight. By the side of it the Sacred Hazel Trees are growing. They lift themselves so loftily and put forth their branches so lustily beyond eyesight that no soul knows where an end comes to them: if end at all. Always in one joyous burgeoning they have leaves and fruit and blossom. Heavy-fruited clusters of nuts they have, scarlet and vermilion, and one by one they drop into the Pool when they have come to ripeness; stirring the waters, troubling them, till from their depths the Salmon rises. He is the Lord of the Pool. He is

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the Jewel of the Waters: every precious stone is his covering. Winnowing with mighty fins he rises, lighting the depths of the Pool with his brightness, scattering stars and star-fire in the eddies of his rising. One by one he swallows the nuts in their falling: they are the Hazels of Wisdom. They are the clustered Nuts of Knowledge: and the Salmon, that has gold of the sun and silver of the moon in every shining scale of him, is the Salmon of Knowledge:

Because of his joy in the Nuts, the Fountain leaps and renews itself:
It leaps and renews itself.
Because of the Fountain, the Hazels are blossoming
Dropping their fruits of scarlet in the Pool of Delight:
And winnowing there in the rain of their falling, vermilion-rinded and golden, the Salmon is glad.
The Salmon is glad.
And glad for his sake is the Pool that forever leaps and renews itself.

"So there is never age on the Fountain; or weariness on the Salmon; or withering on the Sacred Hazels."

"Could I find that Pool, Bovemall; could I look into it?"

"That is not for me to say, Dear Heart. Great seers have seen it in their visions: but only the Shining Ones have power to walk by it, and look into it."

"Did any of the Shining Ones walk by it; did they look into it?"

"Yes, the Shining Ones walked there in the youth of the world; and before the world was fashioned at all: or even thought of. One or other of them would stand by

the Hazel Trees and look into the Pool. They would see the Salmon that is the jewel of the waters; they would see their own unwithering beauty mirrored there and go thence contented. On a time Sive, most lovely of the Shining Ones, came to the Pool. She saw the Salmon winnowing there. She saw the image of her own beauty, but she was not satisfied. She struck the water with her hands and cried:

'*Show me what secrets you keep in the black stillness where the Salmon has never dived: I would see the roots of the Sacred Hazels.*'

"Then the pool was troubled and the waters burst forth and swept Sive down and down, deeper than the roots of the Sacred Hazels, deeper than the Abyss itself, until she came to the Earth — that was not Earth then — that had no shape or promise of trees nor any laughter of streams. Sive that is called Cassir took the Earth into her keeping; she made curves and whorls of beauty in the veins of its rocks, and patterns of beauty on its waters. She nourished and protected it till such a time as another of the Shining Ones came to the Pool. He looked into the depths, trusting to see some new thing; some portent of Sive it may be. He saw the Salmon, and the image of his own beauty.

'*I would see the Abyss,*' he cried, and he struck the waters: as Sive had struck them. They rose in a great surge and swept him down; and down. Powers and thrones and principalities descended with him in a splendid swirl. He was Partholan. He made trees grow upon the Earth, and set broad-leaved water-plants in the lakes that Sive had made. After him came Nemed, flamed and

clouded with constellations. It was Nemed that had knowledge of the Crystal Tower that rears its head above the oceans of the world to the wheel of the stars. He knew the secret name of the sun and the titles of the moon. Then came the Folk of Dahna with the Four Jewels: the Sword of Light, the Caldron of Plenty, the Spear of Victory, and the Stone of Destiny; the Talismans of four great Heaven-Cities. They never took the Jewels back to those four cities, nor did they themselves return. Their feet still gladden the Earth. The honey-bees know them. The swallows cry to them when they are making ready to follow Summer across the dark shoreless waters.

" And still the Shining Ones walked by the Pool, and cared for naught but their own beauty; till Miled came. We are of the race of Miled. The Folk that came with him build the cities of men and give knowledge to their druids and craft of hand to their smiths. Miled and all the Shining Ones have honor among men, for that they made trees and reed-fringed lakes and richness of corn and honey and fruits and pleasant beasts and birds upon the Earth: but Sive, that is named Cassir and who is also called Dahna, is the Mighty Mother. In honor of her the stars are lit. She tosses the sun in the palm of her hand. The moon is a plaything for her."

" She is too mighty to look upon," said Fionn, " she did not seem to be so big when she was Sive."

" She has still the name of Sive," said Bovemall, " and she is also called Brigit. She has more names than you could say over in all the hours of one day; and more shapes."

" Has she any shapes that are small shapes? "

" She has the shape of everything that lives. The shape

of the berry on the tree; the shape of the wind that goes invisible. She is more invisible than the wind, for no one can track her by her foot-prints as one can track the wind."

"Has she still the shape of the Shining One that was Sive?"

"She has still that shape."

"Then one day I will travel and travel and travel till I come to the Pool, and maybe I will set eyes on Sive."

"It may be that you will set eyes on her," said Bovemall, "for who knows what the days and years of a lifetime will bring to anyone?"

Fionn sat very quiet for a while. He settled himself more comfortably against the tree. He shut his eyes tight, and saw a pool darker and bigger than the night-sky. The Salmon moved in it with every scale of him brighter than the sun, larger than the moon of harvest, full-orbed. He winnowed there with fins redder than larch-buds, scarlet, ruby-colored like berries of the yew. Winnowing greenness to the Earth he was, and tempests and hail and flakes of snow and gentle rains and sunny days of Spring and Summer: and luck to Fionn.

And so Fionn slept with tight-shut eyes, till Bovemall waked him later when the venison was drawn from the embers.

THE MOON-BOWL

MESSENGERS threaded their way at times through the forest to Bovemall; weather-beaten men who came secretly. Often after their coming Bovemall and Liath and Fionn moved to a new place in the forest, or found a deep cavern to lurk in for a while. Often Fionn would be told to greet the men. They would look eagerly upon him. They would salute him as the son of a chief should be saluted. They would call him the Young Hawk of Battle, and the Bull of Combats. They kissed the fringes of his ragged deerskin mantle; and one swart-faced man with gold rings in his ears pressed a smooth white queer-shaped bone into Fionn's hand, and said:

" This is a sea-beast's tooth, and has magic in it. Set it in the hilt of your sword for luck when you are man-grown — for you will be man-grown some day, in spite of the Clann Morna: and a good sword-thruster and a lavish-handed chieftain you will be! "

Fionn kept that sea-beast's tooth very carefully, and often when he went supperless to bed he repeated to himself

the words of the swart-faced man — especially the words about a lavish-handed chieftain and good sword-thruster. He wished that he could come by a sword, but there seemed to be little chance of that. He made a sling for himself, and some sharp-pointed javelins; and with these he practised till he could hit a mark at a good distance: it was generally a moving mark, for Fionn was a food-provider and came at last to outrun a deer and take a young boar single-handed.

One night a messenger burst from the shadows, panting and staggering like a spent hound. He spoke hurriedly with Bovemall, and slid into the forest without a word to Fionn.

When he had gone, Bovemall said:

"The end of our good days under the forest trees has come. Crimmall, your father's brother — he that held the broken clann together — is worsted in the game. He must seek a lair in the fastnesses of the west: there men starve in scant seasons, and live hardly at all times. But a worse thing is a-foot. The Clann Morna have knowledge of us. Uail's son lives, they know, and a forest shelters him. They have gathered many fierce dogs, and they will harry Ireland, forest by forest. Crimmall will be no longer here to withstand them or to send us news. It is upon the roadways of the world that we must travel now. It is among wayfarers and in the huts of churls that we must hide; and you must part from us, and lose yourself as comrade-boy to herd-boys, and boys that watch the sown field scattering the robber birds."

"I will be a hunter's lad," said Fionn, "or I will follow after fighting-men and learn their ways."

"Misery is a sharp teacher," said Bovemall, "and a

bitter foster-mother: who knows if we shall ever sit together after to-night."

"Leave this guessing at fate," cried Liath. "You, Bovemall, have the druid wisdom, and the moon-bowl that makes wisdom known! Take it now and see what lies in wait for Fionn."

"When last I held that bowl between my hands and looked in it," said Bovemall, "I saw the death of Uail."

"After the red sun — the black faggots of night," said Liath, "after night — the ashes of dawn and the new-kindled sun! Take the bowl: ill-luck dies sometime, like everything else."

From a secret place Bovemall took a shallow bowl of pale gold. On the rim it was graven with ogham letters and figures of swans and dragons, but moon-pale and pure was the gold within. She filled the bowl with water. She recited the rann that gives vision; and sitting with the bowl beween her hands, she said:

"Come hither, Fionn, White Blossom of my Heart, and move your right hand once above the water in the moon-bowl."

Fionn moved his right hand slowly above the water, then knelt by Bovemall. Liath also knelt. Bovemall looked steadily upon the pale gold water: and eager silence shut in all three of them for a space.

"Do you see aught?" asked Liath.

"I see Fionn in vision after vision, but they change too quickly: at times he is with other lads, at times alone, at times with a grim-faced churl, at times with a gentle poet — once with his mother! Now he is coming forward clearly. He is laughing, and many faces crowd behind him: faces of lads that are laughing and singing. O Fionn,

I see you with sunshine on you and the gladness of victory. You are holding in your hands the Treasure-Wallet of Uail — you are holding it as Uail used to hold it for the Luck-Blessing! "

Bovemall rose and with a sudden gesture poured the water from the divining bowl on Fionn's head.

" *Hail,*" she cried, " *to the Luck-Bringer of Clann Bassna, Hail to the Bringer of the Treasure-Wallet!* "

Fionn did not quite know what was expected of him, so he kept silence: but Liath questioned Bovemall.

" Was it indeed The Treasure-Wallet, The Luck of the Clann, that he had? "

" It was indeed The Treasure-Wallet."

" Tell me of it," said Fionn, " never till this hour have you spoken of it."

" If your father had lived, you would have seen it ere this, for it was carried on festival days round the sacred flame. In it are the potent Talismans and the Jewels of Sovereignty that give luck to Clann Bassna; and supremacy to the Chieftain of the Clann."

" Where must I seek for it? " asked Fionn.

" It is with the worst traitor that ever reddened a hand in the blood of his lord."

" What name has he? " asked Fionn.

" He is Lia of Luachra, the man that had the right to guard the Treasure-Wallet, as his fathers before him had done. Greed to keep it came on him, and he trafficked with Goll of the Clann Morna to betray Uail for the bribe of that Wallet. He lied to Uail on the day of the

battle of Cnucha saying that the Wallet was gone from him. The clann went to the combat without the luck-circling. Uail got his death: the strength of Clann Bassna was broken — and misfortune came to all of us! "

" You saw me with the Luck-Wallet," said Fionn.

" I saw you, Jewel of my Heart! "

" That means," said Fionn, " that I shall slay Lia of Luachra when strength comes to my hands."

" That means," said Bovemall, " that you will be Chieftain of Clann Bassna and Lord of the Fianna of Ireland."

As she spoke a spark leaped from the fire and flamed for a moment in Fionn's deerskin tunic.

" Fire sends you a luck-spark like a true comrade," said Bovemall, " and see, the embers are turning to white ash. It is time for us to say the sleep-rann and to cover the red seed of the fire so that we can waken a spurt of flame in the grayness of dawn, for we must be a-foot and on our journey before the sun shakes the sleep-dews from his hair."

They said the sleep-rann then and covered the embers; and sound sleep held them through the night.

It was Bovemall who blew upon the embers till flame danced there; it was Bovemall who wakened Fionn, while Liath spread thin cakes of pounded acorn-meal to cook on the hot flag-stones and stored victuals for the journey in deerskin wallets. When they were ready to set forth, Bovemall said:

" It is for you, Fionn, to quench the embers for this last time and say farewell to the hearth-flame."

Carefully Fionn quenched the embers, then he strewed green boughs and leaves on them, and said:

" Sleep, Spirit of Flame,
With greenness and redness of blossom;
Do not gnaw upon the tree-roots
Or bite the grass-stems.
Sleep soundly, soundly, very soundly,
Till we, your friends, come — if ever we come — to waken you.
Sleep, Spirit of Flame."

Then Bovemall took wine and water and honey for a farewell gift to the forest that had sheltered them. When she poured the water, she said:

" Oak-wood that sheltered us, farewell! Sap be in your branches; fulness of acorns on your boughs. Health and plentiness of food to all your forest-children."

When she poured the wine, she said:

" I pour wine for you, purple-red; overseas it came in oared galleys — foreign wine of the Greeks. May poets praise you and put jewel-names of you in well hammered verse. May they make bruit of your loveliness in far-off haughty places, and in the walled cities of stranger-kings. Oak-wood that sheltered us, I pour wine for you."

When she poured the honey, she said:

" I pour honey for you. Where honey is, there is the laughter and song of bees; and where mead is — the honey-brew — there is laughter of men; and song. Be laughter with you, laughter of sun and wind and running stream; and song of thrush and ousel and high soaring lark. My heart makes a song for you. Fionn is glad for you: and Liath sings a druid song of peace. Oak-wood that shel-

tered us, farewell. Our hundred thousand blessings with you, and farewell."

So with that leave-taking they set out, each one going separately, on the highways of the world to brave what fortune might be-fall them.

THE SILVER POOL

FIONN walked sturdily forward. Birds were singing in leafy branches. The river Boyne showed a gleam of silver between tree-trunks; it made a soft plashing sound among its reeds. Fionn whistled a little tune as he walked. He had no plan in his mind, save to meet what happened: and day by day to grow tall and strong so that some day he might wrest the Treasure-Wallet from Lia of Luachra; avenge his father's wrong; and win to the headship of the Fianna. Many moons had withered in the sky since he had said farewell to Bovemall and Liath and the kindly oak forest. Many a buffet fate had dealt him since then: many a sharp and evil chance he had known; many a good happening. He had set eyes on many a hill, many a valley since then: he had seen many a proud chieftain's lime-washed dune. Sun had tanned him. His bright hair was cropped like the hair of a churl, chariot-dust of the roadway had grimed his deerskin tunic: save for the pride

of his walk there was little to betray the chief's son in him.

The morning was hot, and the plashy sound of the Boyne drew Fionn to the river side. Picking his way between alder and willow and flowering rush he came to where the water swirled in silvery singing reaches in the pool that is called the Pool of the Star-Dance. By the pool was a man in the garb of the fisher-folk drawing to land a small casting-net. There were silver-gleaming trout spotted with crimson in the net, but the man took them one by one and threw them into the pool again.

"Greeting to you," said Fionn, as he drew near, "and luck on your fishing."

"I have no luck on my fishing," said the man.

"It is a strange thing, indeed," said Fionn, "that you make naught of the red-spotted trout of the Boyne. There's few but yourself would grumble at so good a catch."

"One fish alone I am eager to snare," said the man, "and that is the purple-finned crimson-banded Salmon of Knowledge that has gold of the sun and silver of the moon in every scale of him."

"A wise woman taught me," said Fionn, "that the Salmon of Knowledge swims in the Heaven-World in the pool of the Sacred Hazels."

"She might have taught you, to boot," said the man, "that whatever happens in the Heaven-World makes a shadow of itself here. It is in this pool, they say, that the shadow-self of the Salmon of Knowledge swims. I would snare it."

"I have heard that men of learning and poets can snare the Salmon in a net made of their dreams," said

SOUTH BOSTON

Fionn, " and have thereafter one shining scale of him. You that are the Flower of Poets and the Jewel of Learning should have more than one scale."

" Why do you use this manner of speech to me, that am naught but a plain fisherman? "

" I know you for the King's Poet," said Fionn. " In the year of the Great Assembly I saw you riding on a white stallion with the mane and tail dyed purple; you were wearing the singing robe and the head-dress of a royal poet, and you had fifty princes in your train. I was crouching in the thickness of an oak-bough when you rode past the Wood of the Golden Hawks, and I thought that if I had choice of speech with any one man that went by me there in a flashing chariot, or on a proud-stepping horse, I would choose to have speech with you."

" What help is there in words? " said the man. " You could not teach me how to snare the Salmon: I could not teach you more wood-craft than you know already."

" You could teach me poetry," said Fionn; " and I could serve you: cut rushes for your bed; bring you eggs of the wild duck; and deer from the mountain, with swift hares of the valley."

" What learning and what arts and what weapon-knowledge have you come by? " asked the man.

" Sword-craft I had from a robber that forced me to consort with him. I herded cows for a herb-leech and learned the virtues of herbs. The ways of horses I learned among horse-boys. The forest taught me wood-craft; but he who is ignorant of poetry is but a churl! "

" You shall serve me," said the man, " what name have you? I am, as is known to you, Finnegas the Poet."

" Demna is my name," said Fionn, and in this he spake

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truth, for the name Fionn, which means Beautiful One, was a nickname.

So it came to pass that Fionn abode with the King's Poet. He plaited mats of rushes, he snared wild fowl, he culled water-cress and sweet and bitter herbs of the field such as go with savory meats, he pounded acorns and made bread as he had seen Bovemall do in the forest. And the King's Poet talked with him of heroes and kings and of the art of verse and the ceremonial of palaces. Fionn stored these conversations in his mind: and always he practised with his sling at casting stones, and with a sword of wood at thrusting and parrying, and with a pole cut from an ash tree he practised the hurling of spears. He ran, and jumped, and wrestled with tough boughs and saplings, so that he might grow in strength and hardihood. He put words together in praise of forest things and in praise of the small blossoms of the field and the songs of the blackbird and thrush: the King's Poet taught him how to shape them till he could make good well-hammered verse.

On a day of the days it chanced that Fionn had been praised for a poem, and in lightness of heart he set off to search for eggs of the plover that are delicate to the taste, for he had in mind to make festival for the King's Poet: that had naught himself in mind but the swirling of the Boyne and the Salmon that might lurk in the shallows, or in deep melodious reaches of the waters.

Fionn got the eggs and turned homeward. As he went, his foot struck on something hard, and stooping he saw a piece of strangely shaped greenish metal that had thrust from the marsh-soil. There was something familiar in the curve of it, and his hands dug eagerly into the grass-

roots; more and more eagerly as the treasure unbared itself. At last he drew it forth — a bronze sword, double-edged and perfect! A sword that Gobniu the Smith might have fashioned: a sword the Lugh might have reddened in the battle of Moytirra. Fionn rubbed it with a bunch of grass till it shone greenly, he fingered the finely tapered edges, he gripped the hilt: and all the while the tears ran down his face.

"My Treasure," he cried, "if Uail could see you; or Bovemall that had no sword to give me! If Crimmall knew I had you, his heart would be glad. I will show you to the sunlight. I will take you where you can hear loud battle-shouts — loud as those you heard before the man that had you flung you from him lest his slayers should boast of you! Flame of Battle be glad of me — be glad of me!"

Fionn leaped to his feet, flung the sword into the air, caught it midway and whirled it about his head. Then he gathered up his plover eggs and set off at a run.

As he neared the pool where the King's Poet fished, day in and day out, he saw that something must have happened. The King's Poet was coming hastily to him gesticulating and shouting. Fionn hurried a little more and caught the words.

"I have snared him! I have snared him," the King's Poet was shouting, "I have snared the Salmon of Knowledge!"

And sure enough a small salmon, all silver-scaled and blue and carmine spotted, lay glinting on the bank.

"By what token do you know it for the Salmon of Knowledge," asked Fionn.

"Never have I snared the like of it," said the King's

Poet, " and there is a prophecy that the Salmon of Knowledge will be snared in this pool, and eaten by a poet named Finnegas or Fionn. Now I am Finnegas and I will eat this Salmon."

" Indeed you shall eat it with heartiness and enjoyment," said Fionn, " and I will broil it for you as Bovemall taught me to broil the salmon of the Shannon that are kings' food. I have plover eggs too, and sharptasting herbs: sweet and bitter."

" I will touch naught but the Salmon, that I may have wisdom through it," said Finnegas.

Fionn made ready an oven and broiled the Salmon: but sitting by it, his mind wandered to the sword, and a flame licked the salmon-scales. Fionn turned the fish hastily and as he did so, a little bit of scale stuck to his thumb and burned him. He thrust his thumb into his mouth without thinking and so tasted the Salmon. He watched his work carefully after that, and when the fish was cooked through and through he brought it to Finnegas. Finnegas prepared to eat it as one should eat a sacred fish.

Fionn sat by the river bank and his thoughts were on his sword. Suddenly he was aware that the King's Poet stood beside him.

" A strange thing has happened, Demna," said the Poet, " the savor and virtue of the Salmon have gone. It is as any other fish. Can it be that you have tricked me and have eaten of it? "

" Nay," said Fionn, " I have not tasted of it, save for a scale that clung, burning, to my thumb."

" That scale has taken the virtue of the fish," said the Poet, " and yet it is strange that a prophecy could be so

easily broken. The Salmon was for a poet called Fionn, or Finnegas — and you are Demna! "

" Demna is my name, but I am called Fionn: it is a nickname that stuck to me."

" Fionn, henceforth, will be your true name: for now I see that the Salmon was meant for you. It is not to one who is weary of mart and court and battleground that the Salmon of Knowledge will give himself, but to one who is eager for the sword-hilt and amorous of life."

" I have a sword," cried Fionn, " a sword for a king it is! a luck-bringer, a battle-queller, a singer of war-songs! "

He held up the sword, his eyes caressing it.

Finnegas took it in his hands.

" May luck be with it," he said, " it is indeed a royal sword. How came you by it? "

Fionn told the story of its finding.

" Some Lord of the Shining Folk has blessed this day for you," said Finnegas. " Salmon and Sword! What have you in mind to do with your fortune? "

" I have in mind to avenge my father that was treacherously slain."

" What man was your father? " asked Finnegas, " I know well you are no churl's son."

" I would name my father," said Fionn, " only to one that had loved him, or to the High King of Ireland on that day when I win back my heritage. I am no churl's son, Finnegas, and if I live I will set poetry as a craft for warriors. I will come, too — if I win out — to seek you in whatever place you may be! "

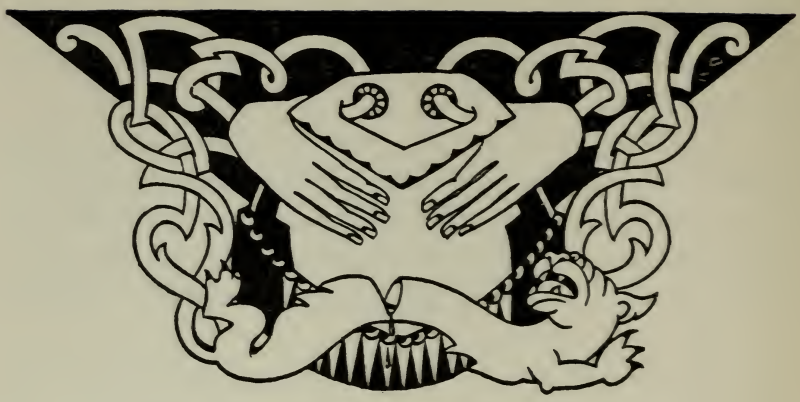
" I know not in what place I may be," said Finnegas, " mayhap at Tara with the High King; mayhap in some mountain wilderness; mayhap in this hut by the river, if I

be not under the sod — but tell me what way of life do you plan for yourself: for I know you will not tarry with me longer."

"I purpose to join with myself other lads, as I find them," said Fionn, "and practise feats and stratagems till we can make ourselves felt in some foray and come by weapons: then we will seek a warrior that is kin to me — outlawed now and in hiding — and do as his wisdom counsels."

"I dare predict that you will win your heritage," said the King's poet. "Eat now the Salmon, and we will spend the hours that remain to us in the telling of tales and the recital of poems and in sound sleep: that to-morrow may be fortunate for your setting forth."

So Fionn ate the Salmon, and wondered if its wisdom would help him to find lads like himself, eager to venture; comrades of the Sword and the Treasure-Wallet. And the King's poet ate the plover eggs with the sweet and bitter herbs; and wondered whether it would be wise to go back again to the bright-colored loud-sounding life of palaces; or wiser to stay in the little hut by the Boyne, watching cloud-shadows: and herons brooding on reedy pools.



THE TREASURE–WALLET

THE OAK-WOOD of the Ridge of the Boar stretched its branches gladly in the sun-light. It had buds and leaves of a red-bronze color, and the wind played delicately amongst them lest it should snap a twig or tear a silken leaf. Deep in the wood was a hidden meadow where the sun-light danced. The trees stood back from it on every side, fencing and protecting it. In the shelter of the trees were several small huts thatched with bracken; beside one of them that was close to a great oak tree an old man stood holding a spear erect like a soldier on guard. He had a tunic of fawn skin worn and ragged, and though he stood up proudly it could be seen that he was spent and feeble and starved-looking. From time to time he shaded his eyes with his hand that he might peer into the shadows of the wood, from time to time he gave a low whistling call. At last a call answered it, and a man with a water-skin on his shoulders came out of the thickest part of the wood.

"Milruc," he said, "I have brought the draught of water, from the Silver Well, that Crimmall had such a longing for last night. Take the skin to him, mayhap he will drink and be eased of his fever — did sleep ease him at all?"

"I am without knowledge of the night, for he would have no one about him. In the redness of dawn he called for me. I found him sitting on his bed of skins, with the red cloak of his chieftainship wrapped about him. 'Make ready,' he said, 'for the coming of Fionn, the son of Uail, who comes to-day to break sorrow and misfortune from us.' Many things my ears have heard, but never the like of it."

"Take the draught of water to him, Milruc, for it is plain that the fever grows on him."

"I dare not go to him, Trostan, for he said to me, 'Stand you on guard. I swear by the Smith, the Hammerer of the Stars, that I will take neither food nor drink till I take it with Fionn.' Since daybreak I have stood on guard."

"My grief and my thousand misfortunes!" cried Trostan. "Who will succor us, who will keep death from Crimmall — for assuredly Fionn, son of Uail, is not on the ridge of the world!"

"Of a truth the earth covers him, my black grief! Did not the sons of Morna search the forests and secret places as hounds search the boar-covert? Fionn, the one hope we had, is dead."

From the shadow of the oak-wood came the short sharp bark of a fox. Milruc imitated the sound, and joy came into his eyes.

"It is Ardan," he said, "with Cathmann and Tabarn.

They have been gone since the quenching of the stars, to search the traps for game; or bring down a deer if their luck leads them to it."

The three men that came from the oak trees into the forest meadow were old. They limped with weariness. One of them had a couple of birds in his hand, the other two carried a deer. Trostan ran to them:

"Let us scoop the cooking-oven," he said, "with as little noise as may be, for the fever is still strong on Crimmall."

"It may chance," said Tabarn, "that it would do him good to know of the luck we have had. It is not every day that we come upon a deer, and we have no hounds now — my grief — to rouse one!"

"There is naught that will do Crimmall good," said Trostan, "save what his heart is set on — a sight of Fionn! And he must go where the dead are, I misdoubt me, to get sight of him."

Without more words, Trostan began to make ready the cooking-pit. The others set to preparing the victuals, and it was not till they heard Milruc giving the salutation, that they looked towards the hut and perceived that Crimmall had come forth, tall, gaunt, and fever-wasted, in his richly broidered crimson mantle.

"Do you not hear," he said, "the shouting and the singing in the forest? It is Fionn and the young fighters with him — his comrades!"

"My Chieftain," said Tabarn, going over to him, "may the gods make true your foretelling. I was in the wood-path but a short time ago with Cathmann and Ardan: no bruit of song or laughter reached our ears."

"It is because your ears are stopped. I hear the rattling

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of their shield-rims. I can discern which voice is Fionn's, though never have my eyes beheld him. There is a hound with them, running out in front of them; listen — listen — to the patter of its feet."

" May the gods pity us," muttered Tabarn, and he moved to where Cathmann and Trostan and Ardan stood straining their ears for a sound. Crimmall put his hands to his mouth and shouted through them the master-call to a hound. The silence following that call was deep: the very oak-leaves and grasses seemed to listen in it. Crimmall listened with joy and expectation in his countenance. He gave the call a second time; and a third. Suddenly a hound burst from the undergrowth at the far side of the meadow. He was a tawny brown-brindled hound large enough and strong enough to pull down a red heavy-antlered stag of the hills. For a while he stood motionless at the edge of the meadow in the May sunshine: then he turned his head sharply, pricked his ears, and sprang back into the wood.

" It is a hound from Faery Land," cried Trostan, " that the Chieftain has called. Maybe it is the hound that follows Lugh the Long-Handed."

" Lugh's hound is white," said Ardan.

" Cease your chattering," cried Crimmall, " folk without sense! That was Fionn's hound. Surely now ye can hear the voices and laughter."

They could of a surety hear voices, aye, and laughter too, and running feet, and the clash of sword upon shield-rim. Presently a company of youths burst from the shelter of the wood and came running across the meadow. They were laden with spoil as though from the sacking of a king's dune. Silver, bronze, and golden vessels clinked on their shoulders; wine-skins they had, and a disorder of

rich apparel; chains of gold on their necks and bracelets on their arms. They approached in a riot of song and laughter till they came near to the old men. Then a tall sinewy youth with thick curling red-gold hair stepped in front, and at a word from him the others fell into line so that they advanced in military formation. The leader carried between his hands a wallet made of outlandish skin, and decorated with curious designs and colors. He carried it as though it were a treasure-ark, walking proudly.

"Fionn, son of Uail," cried Crimmall, "come close to me. Let me put my hands on your shoulders. I would know of a surety that you have come to gladden my eyes."

"I have brought what is better than myself," said Fionn. "Here is the Treasure-Wallet of Uail: with the Jewels of Sovereignty and the potent Talismans that gods have handled. Take it, Crimmall, brother of my father."

Crimmall raised the Treasure-Wallet in his hands.

"This carries the luck of Clann Bassna," he said. "Of a surety to-day the Deliverer has come to us, even as Lugh the Long-Handed came to the Folk of Dahna when they were broken with misfortune. This Treasure-Wallet was filched from Uail on the day of the battle of Cnucha: the loss of it was loss of battle-luck to him. The man who filched it was Lia of Luachra, and it was he who dealt the first wound to Uail. Now I have good hope that the treachery is avenged: for Uail's son brings back the Treasure-Wallet. Tell me, Fionn, my Joy and my Hope, is Lia dead?"

"Of a truth he is dead," said Fionn, "and dead almost by blind chance it would seem. We had no thought of him when we set forth, I and my comrades, to seek you in the forest fastness. Stealing secretly by hidden paths

we were, and avoiding the sight of lime-washed dunes with their palisades and dykes and armed men. In a forest path some hours a-gone, ere the sun climbed into the sky, we came on a woman crouched by the body of a young lad. Blood and tears were mixed on her face, and we saw the death-wounds of the young lad. 'What lad is this?' I asked of the woman. 'He is my son,' said the woman, 'that Lia of Luachra has slain: as he has slain many a one.' 'Why does no avenger slay him?' I asked. 'My grief,' said the woman, 'he has harried the country-side too well. All the brave ones are slain.'

"Into my mind came the memory of what Bovemall had told me of this man's treachery: and into the hearts of my comrades came great anger and courage, and we said to the woman, 'Show us the way to the dune of Lia.' In the dusk we approached it cautiously, carrying faggots and brushwood. We set fire to the palisades, and slew Lia as he burst forth on us. The household fled in confusion, and we sacked the dune. That is why we have rich cloaks and gold cups and skins of foreign wine and kneaded cakes of wheaten flour. In his secret chamber, in a chest of red yew, was the Treasure-Wallet: no hands but mine have touched it till your hands clasped it, Crimmall, and be glad now with us, for we have come to feast with you and with your noble comrades who have been faithful through all the evil years."

"I knew it, Fionn," said Crimmall, "my heart had news of you before you came. Sit down now, and let the youths your comrades sit down, for we have meat in our oven — and joy in our hearts such as never we had since the death of Uail!"

In the green forest meadow the old men and the young

lads sat down, and the feast that they had there gladdened them, as the sun gladdens the earth. Song they had and laughter and a recounting of adventures. Crimmall learned how Fionn had been reared in the forest, and Fionn said:

"Tell me, Crimmall, how it fared with you through all these years."

"I scarce know," said Crimmall, "for the thought of misfortune and hardship has left my mind, even as the fever has left my body. We held together, myself and these comrades you see with me: and other proud and brave comrades that are dead. From place to place we were hunted, sometimes fighting, sometimes fleeing. Foxes we learned to be, and wolves, and burrowers underground. It was a game that seemed good to us till age stiffened our limbs, and the last of our hounds died. Many a time our hearts were sore for the sight of a good hound — a lithe strong-shouldered, swift-footed hound such as we had when we had youth and riches and our hearts' asking of the world: it is a good thing, Fionn, that you have brought your hound. I would rather have my hand on him than on a golden cup, and as for Trostan and Milruc, they are one mind with me. Have you come of a truth to tarry with us, Fionn, you and your comrades?"

"Nay," said Fionn, "we too are foxes and wolves and deep-burrowing badgers. We must never be two nights in the same lair, or drink twice from the same spring. We will bestow the plunder we have brought in such hiding-place as seems good to you; and do you, Crimmall, keep the Treasure-Wallet till I come again to ask it as Lord of the Fianna of Erin: for if I live I will be no less than my father was."

"Truly you are the Golden Hawk," said Crimmall, "you are the Red Bull with Silver Horns; you are the Hound that turns not back; you are the soft-padded Wolf following a prey: and Hound, and Wolf, and Hawk, and Bull, my blessing on you till the sun forgets his brightness, and the moon ceases her wanderings in the starry meadows."

The oak tree shadows had stretched themselves to the utmost on the hidden meadow: the sky was violet dusk, and one star burned in it.

"Look," cried Milruc, "a star watches us. It would be well for us to circle the Treasure-Wallet and the meadow, in order that we may bind our luck upon us."

"It would be well," said Crimmall. And through the dewy meadow he led them, twisting and turning and winding, coiling and uncoiling, circling the Treasure-Wallet and the meadow till the Wain of Arthur showed itself in the purple heavens.

"Deep sleep is due to us," said Crimmall, "and to-morrow it shall be as Fionn desires. He shall set forth at sunrise with all the luck that we can bind on him and all that his brave heart brings him. We will harbor ourselves in our secret hiding places: of a surety not one of us will let death catch him till the Eagle of Clann Bassna returns."

So darkness fell and deep silence and sleep. But through the night the Treasure-Wallet shone with radiance of its own. It burned with every color like a jewel of flame — like the jewelled Star-Dancer, Sirius — and indeed it was in truth a jewel, the Luck-Jewel of Clann Bassna, a magnifier of luck, a Talisman of long life and honor.

THE LORDSHIP OF THE FIANNA

THE ROAD TO TARA

Fionn, son of Uail, stood on a small eminence and let his eyes delight themselves with the palaces of Tara. They were spread multitudinously below him, with their silken banners and their carved roof-poles and their gaily colored walls, like a piece of rich broidery-work flung for a vaunt on the green slanting meadows. Fionn had dreamed of those palaces upon hearsay for many a long year. His childish mind had colored them and carved their roof-beams with incredible devices. Man-grown his desire had dwelt among them. He had toughened his sinews in many a fight, he had endured hardship, he had denied himself pleasure, for the sake of this moment — Tara beneath him, and his feet on the road to it! The sun was high in the heavens, he had no need to hasten his steps. The palaces of Conn, Son of Felimy, the king that his father had loved; the palaces where Goll could lord it now as chief of the Fianna of Ireland! Uail, while

he lived had been chief of the Fianna: Goll had slain him.

" It is a goodly spectacle," said a voice beside him, " fill your eyes with it. To-morrow the sun will look on blackened ruins."

" Who are you," cried Fionn, " to prophesy such a devastation? "

" I am Datho, one who has lands and thralls in this place. If you were not country-bred and a stranger you would know that on the Eve of Sowan, every three years, Allyn, son of Midna, burns Tara."

" One man burns Tara! "

" He is of the Folk of Dahna: and those that are wise in such matters say even that he comes from the Mountain of the Smith, Slieve Cullion."

" The Mountain of Cullion! The Mountain of Mananaun? "

" That Mountain! And it is from Shee Finnacha where Lear himself dwells that he comes: the High Radiant Dwelling-Place on the crest of the Mountain that is crowned with Flames redder than carbuncle stones through the hours of the day; and crowned with White Fire at night, lest man or beast or smallest creeping thing set foot there."

" Have not the Gods their share of honor? " asked Fionn, " Have they not their fill of praise and sacrifice? Why does this one torment us? "

" If the ancient rocks know it they keep the secret: but men will never be without stories of any happenings; or deaf to prophecies and haphazard sayings."

" What stories have they of this happening? "

" They say it is for the sake of a spear. They say that

Uail, he that was chief of Clann Bassna and Head of the Fianna once, took that spear out of a Faery Palace, the palace of Allyn, son of Midna."

" Where is that spear? " cried Fionn.

" Where is last year's snow? " said the man.

" Is it with Goll of the Clann Morna the spear is? "

" It is not with Goll, or with any man so far as is known. Goll sacked the strong dune of Uail and took many a treasure from it, but he did not take the spear."

" Has strength withered in the hand of every champion: is there no strength in the battalions of the Fianna to withstand the burning? "

" You can try your own strength on it for the matter of that," said Datho. " The king offers his choice of a reward, and the contentment of his heart-wish, to the man who will stay the burning."

" Has Goll made trial of it? "

" Aye, Goll has made trial of it; and Goll's brother Garra; and bald-headed Cunnaun: the king himself has made trial; and slept with the best of them! "

" Slept! "

" Even so — slept — for when Allyn, son of Midna, comes he brings such music with him that a man in the very extremity of torture would sleep at the sound of it. The hounds sleep, the very rats in the granaries sleep. Everything that draws the breath of life sleeps, till Allyn, son of Midna, makes an end of playing. It is music he brings instead of a sword."

" If Uail, son of Trenmor, were here there might be need of a sword."

" Uail did not keep his own head safe," said Datho, " upon his proud shoulders."

" Who are you to take lightly in your mouth the name of Uail, son of Trenmor, son of Bassna? "

" One that saw him in his magnificence a time or two: but if you would speak with a clansman that held him dear from boyhood, there limps your choice! "

A large-limbed man, whom age had bowed without taming, was walking heavily and lamely along the road. He carried three freshly-caught trout on a gad.

" That man," said Datho, " is Fiacha, son of Conga, once a man of mark, a follower that wrecked his fortunes for Uail. Rather than submit to Goll he lives in a mean hut without even a hound to share his poverty."

" I will speak with him," said Fionn.

" Come hither, Fiacha, son of Conga," cried Datho, " here is one that would question you."

" I am beholden to no man," said Fiacha, " let him who would question me keep step for step with me on the road."

" Well-spoken! " cried Fionn, and crossing to the old man he kept step for step with him on the road.

" What name do you bear," asked Fiacha, " you who would question me? "

" I am Fionn, son of Uail, son of Trenmor, son of Bassna."

The old man stopped suddenly on the road: his hands began to tremble.

" Why do you say this thing to tempt me? " he cried.

" I say the truth to you: have I no semblance of my father? "

The old man peered closely into Fionn's face. " You have Uail's eyes," he said, " and if you be indeed his son, tell me what mark was on the Treasure-Wallet of Uail."

" The Treasure-Wallet came from the Brugh of Angus:

the marks that are upon the threshold stone of the Brugh are upon the Treasure-Wallet."

"Oh, if your hands have touched it, tell me how is it marked within."

"It is marked within with the secret names of the Four Jewels that the Gods of Dahna brought from the Heaven-World."

"May the sun protect you, Fionn son of Uail: may the earth make safe the pathways for you. Have you, my lord, the Treasure-Wallet of Uail?"

"I have the Treasure-Wallet."

"Pulse of my Heart, and Chieftain of Clann Bassna, I have a gift for you," said Fiacha, "poor and broken though I am — I have a thing hidden away; a treasure that I never hoped to put in the hand of Uail's son."

"Good will be the gift of one who loved my father. Tell me of it."

"It is the Spear that Uail took from the Gods of Dahna. I snatched it away, wrapped in its cloak of darkness, even whilst Goll and his people sacked the dune. Wrapped in its cloak I buried it, and over the place of its sepulture I built my poor hut. To-night, if you will, your hands shall hold it."

"Fiacha, friend of my father, with that Spear to-night I may win back my heritage: for it is in my mind to try fortunes with Allyn son of Midna."

"Terrible is the Spear, son of Uail. I would not bribe you with it to your death. Who knows if Allyn can be slain!"

"My mind was hardened to encounter him ere I met you. With or without the Spear I will engage to guard Tara to-night."

"The word in your mouth is the word of a chief. Hasten to Tara. Say naught of the Spear. I will bring it to you secretly when you shall have chosen your vantage ground."

"Fiacha," said Fionn, "had my father lived he would have given me to a princely house to foster. I have a noble foster-mother though she fostered me without a roof. No man is my foster-father: if I win out to-night, I will be your foster-son."

"Win victory, son of Uail! I would say that to you though you should never waste a second word on me. Win victory for Uail that is dead, and for the broken men of the Clann Bassna."

"For Clann Bassna!" said Fionn, and he set forth swiftly on the road to Tara.

CONN THE HUNDRED-FIGHTER

CONN THE HUNDRED-FIGHTER sat in his chair of state in the royal hall at Tara. A tower of strength was Conn the Hundred-Fighter, a flaming torch of valor, a candle of munificence. Gorgeously apparelled he made a brightness where he sat. The Chief Druid, Kith the Red, was on his right, his head bound with a golden fillet, his purple robe embroidered in seven colors: on his left was the Royal Poet wearing his ceremonial robe made of the bright feathers of birds. Huge waxen candles lit the hall, their reflections danced and flickered on the walls where thin sheets of beaten copper took the place of tapestry. Rivetted with studs and knobs of red bronze that copper was, and fashioned to the shapes of strange birds; birds such as druids summon with incantations. Upon the crests of

these birds jewels glittered, cunningly wrought: red carbuncles served them for eyes.

There was gloom on the face of Conn: his brows were drawn in a frown, his thoughts were on the burning of Tara. And even as he sat thus, the trumpets of his proclamation sounded without. Great trumpets of bronze, brazen-throated, of a bulk that scarce one man could carry; they made a roaring sound like the bellowing of unearthly bulls or like thunder shut in a cavern. Seven of them gave bellowing voice, and earth reverberated with the sound. Scarce had the air ceased to tremble when Conn seized the bell-branch, the branch of silver with little bells upon it like apples of gold. Conn shook it for silence within the hall; it made a high sweet ecstatic sound like the twittering of small birds in Springtime. The loud voice of the herald came resonant from without:

"*The High King of Ireland, Conn the Hundred-Fighter, offers to whatsoever warrior; magician; son of learning; poet; or simple artificer, has power or skill to keep the flames this night from Tara, his own asking of reward: and the contentment of his heart's wish if it be in a king's power to grant it.*"

The trumpets bellowed again: and whilst they bellowed, Fionn entered the hall. His red-gold hair and his height would have drawn men's eyes in any assembly. Tall and lithe and strong he was and young and goodly to look upon: his hair was wound close about his head, braided like the locks of a champion ready for combat, but save for the short sword in his belt he had neither shield nor weapon.

"Greeting to the High King of Ireland," said Fionn, "may prosperity multiply itself upon him."

"Greeting and blessing to you, young warrior," replied Conn.

"High King of Ireland," said Fionn, "if it should please the Gods that I shelter Tara from the flames to-night, will you indeed give me my own asking of a reward: and my heart's desire to me?"

"I will give it indeed," said the King.

Fionn looked to where Goll sat, broad-shouldered and fierce-eyed under his thick brows.

"O King," said Fionn, "it may be that to some lords in this assembly the reward I have it in my mind to ask will prove unpleasing. I would have the King's word bound on sureties."

Conn laughed a great laugh and looked round his hall. Kings from the five provinces of Ireland were there; they had come to take part in the ceremonies of the Festival of Sowan; magicians and druids of note were there.

"You have a high and confident heart, my Champion," said Conn, "will you bind the bond on the kings that are here; and on Red Kith, the chief magician; and the magicians that follow him?"

"I could ask no better sureties," said Fionn.

Then was the oath tied with magic knots and strength of earth and fire and water to the satisfaction of Fionn. It was an uplifting of heart to the assembly.

"Tell me, my Treasure," said Conn, "of what lineage are you, and what name had your father?"

"Royal King," said Fionn, "I have not uttered my father's name save in secret: let it still be secret if I perish to-night. If I win victory I will make known my father's name and his lineage when I ask my reward."

"Let it be so, my Hawk of Battle," said the King, "and

if shield or spear be lacking to you, choose from the best of mine."

" I have proffer of a weapon," said Fionn, " it will suffice me."

" May the great Battle-Queen lend power to it," said the King, " and drink now a horn of mead with me and with these kings and lords who wish you well."

The cup-bearers of the king filled a horn of white bronze. Fionn took it in his hand.

" Win victory and blessing, O King," he said, " this hour, and in every hour that the Smith hammers out for you."

" Win victory and blessing, my Hawk of Battle," said the King.

Fionn turned himself to the gathering night.

THE SPEAR BIRGHA

Behind Fionn, ramparted Tara crouched in darkness. The King had ordered it so. No smallest glimmer of a rushlight showed in any place: if Tara flamed to-night it would be lit by Allyn, son of Midna. From the North the son of Midna would come: even now he might be approaching, and Fionn had not the Spear! Alert as a wolf, his eyes searched the gloom, his ears searched the stillness; and before he could see anything he knew by faint and scarce detected sounds that someone was coming with stealthy cautious steps.

" Son of Uail," a voice whispered, " it is I, Fiacha, I have the Spear."

" My blessing on you," said Fionn, " give it into my hands; it is my choice of a weapon to-night."

" Very terrible is the Spear," said Fiacha, " Birgha it is named: feel how the blade leaps and quivers, even though the cloak that is wound so tightly all the length of it blinds and restrains it. A demon writhes there: only once did your father unhood it, and then — by a hazard leap from his hand — it drank the life-blood of a warrior that he loved! "

Fionn's eager fingers closed on the haft: his hand moved circumspectly on the muffled blade.

" It lives, of a truth," he said, " but this cloak that hoods it seems no more than a silken swathe."

" Do not unwind that swathe till you are ready to launch the Spear. It is a cloak of some outlandish stuff: so fine that you could draw it through your thumb-ring. It came from that same palace whence your father reft the Spear: the ardency of the blade has not worn it, nor the years of its hiding cankered it. I would you could see the colors it has. It is a cloak from Faeryland."

" My mother came thence; mayhap she had such cloaks."

" Do not tangle your mind with aught but the night's work," said Fiacha. " If sleep does not thicken my lids, my heart will watch with you."

" Your heart will watch," said Fionn, " and dead men that were comrades of yours may watch in company. Go safely! "

" Win victory and blessing, Son of Uail: and should this night thrust you from life, say to Uail that Fiacha, Conga's son, was faithful."

Fionn was alone. The Spear writhed and trembled in his grasp. The dark plain spread widely to the dark horizon. It was Sowan Eve: no one who could help it would be outdoors on Sowan Eve. Every palisaded dune, every

wattled hut would be closed and barred to-night. But the dunes of the Folk of Dahna would be open. The mountain-palaces would be open. To-night the Folk of Dahna walked abroad. To-night they had power. To-night, if a man dared the hazard, he could question the gods! Fionn tightened his grasp on the Spear: he was glad to feel the demon life in it, glad to feel it writhe and twist in his hands, eager and venomous.

The night crawled dumbly by like a wounded cumbrous beast dragging its heavy length. Fionn's mind dragged wearily and heavily like the hours; his hands wrestled with the Spear. No sight — no sound — no faintest stirring! So the hours dragged: endlessly, listlessly. But of a sudden between his hands the Spear tensed. The earth stirred itself. The air took lightness. MUSIC! Yes, it was music, very far off: a faint music, yet shrill and of an unearthly sweetness.

Fionn never could say afterwards what instrument it was that played. It was like a high lilting voice, and at the sound of it something in himself gave a great leap for joy: he felt that he was towering above himself, towering as if to equal the surge of melody, the tumult that was suddenly everywhere: in the earth; in the air; in the low distant hills; in the near-by dark druid-hill of Thlacta. Voices cried in that mighty surge; exultantly, defiantly: voices piercing sweet, in a monotony of one note; harsh voices that wavered like tongues of flame. Vast litanies intoned themselves with multitudinous responses as if every forest leaf had a tongue. Trumpets gave it urgency. There were clashings of cymbals: and sweet strings of viol; and timpaun; and harp. Voices more than mortal sang in exalted chorus: and through every maze of sound there ran

and scintillated and glittered — like stars in the milky way, like sparks of fire from an anvil — a myriad silver tinklings of shaken bells.

Minute by minute the music changed. It was patterned, as reedy shallows are patterned by the feet of the wind: it gathered itself as a wave gathers, curving to fall: and like foam on the running eager crest of a wave — like the silvery flash of a salmon in swirling waters — the first unearthly melody, the high lilting sweetness, maintained itself. Ah, what was it that the son of Midna was playing? Why did Fionn take part with him against himself? He was playing the stars out of the sky; he was playing the earth to nothingness, and yet Fionn exulted and towered out of his body to listen! What was that thin sweet song! Sun moon and stars were dust upon the wind — small scattered dust — and yet the song persisted: how could so thin and fine a sweetness consume the heart?

It was Fionn's heart now that fed the song, it was his strength that shrivelled in the wind: almost fainting he leant his forehead on the spear-point. And then he knew a strange thing. The Spear Birgha had a song — a song like a shaft of white light! Birgha, the Spear, was singing of battles, and of hero-deeds; of hazards and ventures; and of hardship; of men that dared, and snatched a victory; of men that dared, and lost: and recked not of loss. What vibrant strength was in the song! Fionn's heart grew red again and his feet took a firmer grip of the Earth.

But was it the Earth — any Earth that Fionn knew? The grass was taking color of greenness — burning with greenness such as never daylight gave it! Flowers of scarlet and vermilion and azure — flowers the sun had never

looked upon — trembled in it. The great dome of the sky bent low and low, a burning insufferable sapphire.

And now he saw the son of Midna, as if he had stepped over the rim of the world. Every color flamed and flashed about him, every surge of melody pulsed and fell: the whiteness of his body in the midst of it was like the whiteness of flame.

Fionn thrust the point of the Spear savagely against his forehead. He was standing for the men of Clann Bassna: men who had watched and starved on the hills; who had died in waste places, fugitive and broken — men who had kept the will to thwart Destiny. Hunted, harassed, poverty-bitten, they were outcast for Uail his father; they had died — some of them — for Fionn. They were blood of his blood; bone of his bone. Did they not cry to him out of their anguish, out of their unvanquishable valor: "*Stand fast. STAND FAST.*"

Fionn began to unswathe the Spear: with deliberation he unswathed it lest he should injure the cloak; and as he loosened it, Allyn son of Midna — blinding, terrible in his beauty — was close upon him. He stood for a moment like a bright unearthly bird. He did not seem to be aware of Fionn, his eyes looked through and beyond Fionn as though he looked into the nothingness that is beyond the world.

He blew a breath from between his lips towards the ramparted palaces of Tara.

The hissing fierceness of lightning was in that breath!

Fionn had but loosed the cloak: almost despairingly he held it spread against that vehemence of flame. The flame played upon the cloak, dazzling it to a thousand colors: then sped hissing into the earth.

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Allyn son of Midna blew for the second time a breath from between his lips towards the ramparted palaces of Tara.

It had the white fierceness of lightning — that breath! Like lightning it shone and dazzled on the cloak; and sped hissing into the earth.

Allyn son of Midna cast a glance about him as a mighty antlered stag casts a glance when he is aware of some forest portent and scarce knows whether to fight or flee.

A third time he blew a breath towards the ramparted palaces of Tara.

A third time the vehement hissing flame descended into the earth!

Then Allyn son of Midna turned and fled.

With the naked Spear in his grasp Fionn son of Uail leaped after him: and still the music surged; and still the voices cried in it; still every instrument made riotous ecstasy while reeling earth and reeling heaven flamed together! Fionn could be sure of naught in this strange world save the beating of his heart and the pounding of his feet as he ran. Light as flame ran Allyn son of Midna; and behind him and about him and before him the earth blossomed in starry fire.

Northward they sped — northward towards the Mountain of the Smith, towards the Radiant Dwelling Place, Shee Finnacha.

Splashing through the shallows of the Boyne, Fionn lifted a handful of the silvery sacred water and dashed it in his face and eyes. " Hail Goddess," he cried in a choking salutation, for the river was sacred to Dahna, the Mighty Mother. It may be that she helped him: it may be that the son of Midna felt the strangeness of Fionn's

world clogging and interpenetrating his own, for he ran with less lightness. And Fionn, running like a wolf — the beast that brings down every other by sheer persistency — felt strength and toughness increasing in himself.

So they sped northward — always northward.

Allyn son of Midna was no longer aurioled. The music too was swooning to a stillness. Fionn heartened himself — and heartened himself again. The son of Midna was naught but a slender youth running wearily. Yet he could not come within spear-cast!

It was so till Slieve Cullion — the Mountain of the Smith, the Hammerer, the Shaper and Fashioner of the World — stood in their path. Fionn knew that mountain shouldering against the sky, steep and shaggy. Allyn son of Midna could not breast it, running so wearily. Fionn heartened himself once more — yet the son of Midna kept out of spear-cast! Then, of a sudden the mountain opened. It was not a mountain but a fortressed dune, a great palace whose roofs and pinnacles glittered to the stars and lost themselves amongst them!

Mountain-vast within, the palace glowed with a soft and changing radiance and from the deep recesses of its portal the Folk of Dahna like bright-colored blossoms looked out. They cried encouragement to Allyn son of Midna: yet ever he ran more wearily, lagging step by step. Fionn — running as the wolf runs on the track of a hind — judged his distance. Suddenly with all his force he loosed the Spear, Birgha. It struck the son of Midna between the shoulders and pierced him through. At that the Folk of Dahna gave a great anguished cry: but the son of Midna by a mighty effort kept his feet. Lagging, fainting, he stumbled on.

" Win victory, O Blossomed Branch, win victory," cried the folk in the portal: but they did not leave the shelter of the dune; they did not stretch rescuing hands to the son of Midna. Almost as his feet gained the threshold Fionn seized him by the hair and drew him backward — drew him reeling to the earth!

With his fall there came a sound like a clap of thunder. The air was full of voices that cried: " *Aie,*" " *Aie,*" " *Aie,*" but there was no glimmer of radiance left, nor any pinnacle of all that heaven-scaling host. In a cold pallor of waning stars Slieve Cullion shouldered the sky blackly.

In the thin cold light of stars Fionn looked down upon his capture. Allyn son of Midna lay as one dead: yet his body — pallid and slender, white as the shadow of the moon in water — showed no wound! Fionn's eyes searched for the Spear: keen as a hawk questing the ground, he searched for the Spear, Birgha. It was nowhere — nowhere! Fionn's gaze came back to the son of Midna: he was loath to draw weapon upon that fairness; his hands were loath to touch again hair that kept such brightness.

The son of Midna leaned upwards on one arm. He smiled wearily and mockingly at Fionn, his eyelids heavy on his eyes.

" My head is yours," he said, " for a night and part of a day. The Spear is mine till the end of time. I do not rue the bargain."

He let himself sink back upon the earth: he shuttered his eyes; and neither spoke word after that; nor drew breath.

Fionn took his head.

TARA

THE NOBLES of Tara, at the palace gates, spread their cloaks for Fionn to tread upon; and cried:

" Let the Savior of Tara give battle-luck! "

And so he came proudly before the King.

" Conn the Hundred-Fighter, son of Felimy, High King of Ireland," he said, " I bring you the head of Allyn son of Midna: grant to me my heart's desire, and my own asking of reward. It is Fionn, son of Uail, son of Trenmor, son of Bassna, who asks."

There was clash and rumor of voices in the hall: and chiefs got to their feet. ' Fionn son of Uail! son of Trenmor! ' Some whispered it in consternation; some doubtfully; some with open joy. ' Son of Uail ' — that name ran through the assembly — son of the great dead chief! ' Fionn, the Savior of Tara! '

Conn the Hundred-Fighter shook the bell-branch till there was a great silence in the hall.

" Set the head of him that blackened Tara, pole-high upon the ramparts that the sun may look scornfully upon it; and the eyes of the people behold it," said the King, " and give ear to the Champion who has brought deliverance."

In all that assembly there was not one who did not turn his eyes upon Fionn.

" Son of Uail, what is your request," said Conn the Hundred-Fighter, " and what is the fulfillment of your heart's desire? "

" I ask the Lordship of the Fianna of Ireland," said Fionn, " and recompense and honor and the favor of the

King's countenance for the broken men of Clann Bassna: that is my heart's desire."

"The Lordship of the Fianna, you have won," said the King, "and favor and recompense and honor for the men of Clann Bassna: and here before the kings and poets and royal druids shall the chiefs and leaders and champions of the Fianna swear faith to you. And if there is one who withholds service from you, let him take ship for Alba or for Scotland or whatever country seems good to him on the ridge of the world, and depart thence."

Goll, son of Morna — Lord, till that moment, of the Fianna of Ireland — got to his feet.

"Fionn, son of Uail," he said, "your battle-skill outbids mine. I put my hand in yours: I am your man."

Goll's brothers, Garra and Cunnaun and Art, and the chiefs next in rank to them, stood up and spoke as Goll had spoken: and with oaths and fitting ceremonies their fealty was bound to Fionn. But as they greeted him with joyous acclamation there rose a great clangor and clamor without, and one entered the hall crying:

"Behold a marvel — a marvel, O King! Scarce had we set the head of Allyn son of Midna high upon the rampart-pole — that all the folk might look on it — scarce had the sun beheld it, when a great bird swooped sudden out of the sky. Feathered with silver and crested with gold that bird was. He stooped upon the rampart-pole, he cherished and sheltered the head there with his feathers, and rising bore it away: making a sweet and lamentable crying."

"It is well known to us," said the King, "that Allyn son of Midna was of the Folk of Dahna. They care for their own."

But Fionn turned over in his mind the son of Midna's words:

'My head is yours for a night, and part of a day. The Spear is mine till the end of time. I do not rue the bargain.'

THE PALACE OF ALOON

With pomp and the sound of trumpets Fionn took possession of the Palace of Aloon; with open-handedness he kept house there. It was part of his heritage: the Shining Folk had built it for Moorna, his mother.

Beautiful as a dream was the Palace of Aloon. Men praised their luck when they set eyes on it, bright-colored on the bright hill like a flower or a star. A great Lord of the Shining Ones built it: Nuada of the Silver Radiance. He built it with songs and incantations and the joyousness of his heart. For love of him mighty Djinns laid the stones of it in order, one upon another — huge stones such as only Djinns could lift! Lugh, that is Master of Every Craft, carved the door-lintel and put color-work upon the walls: and every broidery and every treasure of gold and bronze and silver and carved crystal-work the heart could think of was gathered there.

Below it spread the wide cloud-shadowed plain with the courses for chariot-racing, and the road that went to Tara.

Very joyous within was the Palace of Aloon. Harpers made music there; and players upon the timpaun; and players upon pipes: and there was a sound of laughter and of singing voices. The green spaces cloistered by its palisades had many shade-giving trees, and in the boughs of them birds made a whirring of wings and a lilting gladness of song. Poets and druids and young proud warriors were in the Palace of Aloon; youths too that came to learn the ways of chivalry that they might win entrance to the Fellowship of the Fianna. It was not easy to be of that Fellowship. Fionn would take no one that could not fit to a poem the rhymes and assonances that make the worth of it; he would take no one that could not with his shield and a hazel-rod save himself from nine spears cast all at once at him; no one that could not shake off pursuers racing through a forest and come from among the branches unwounded and without a loosened strand of his braided hair; no one that could not in his running leap over a branch the height of himself, or stoop under one the height of his knee. It was a close brotherhood the Fellowship of the Fianna: no man of it looked to his kin to avenge his wrongs or ask help from them in adversity — rather he looked to his comrades — and each was bound to noble rules of life: he was a giver of gifts, and a lord of hospitality, a succorer of the needy and of those in peril and distress: nor was he haughty towards any man, but gentle and courteous in word and act. Goll was of that Fellowship, and Garra his brother, and Cunnaun too; Lewy's Son was in it, and Diarmid that was as beautiful as Angus the Ever-Young; Keeltya that was so close a friend of Fionn was in it, and Fionn's Son, Usheen, and the Son of Usheen,

Oscar; and many another of whom the story-tellers and poets make vaunt.

Like a proud branching tree that has leaves and fruits at all seasons, and birds to sing in its blossomed boughs was the Fellowship of the Fianna; like the red glad sun that joys in his labor. For a while it triumphed and flourished with the wide free airs of heaven blown about it and the whole of Ireland to hunt in: but the sun must come to his setting and every tree crashes earthward at last! So it was with the Fianna: root, and branch, and blossomed bough.

Piled-up cairns and grave-mounds of its queens and warriors hold their place even to this day, but alas for the Palace of Aloon! There is not one stone left of its magical stones for a passer-by to wonder at.

SABA

ONE NIGHT in his Palace of Aloon Fionn's mind was troubled and there came a great restlessness upon him and a desire to have the stars over his head rather than the carved roof-beams of Aloon. He rose without wakening his household and called softly to the hounds, Bran and Sgeolaun. Many a time he had stolen away with those two hounds for company: Bran, the snow-white, precious one; and Sgeolaun, that was white, leopard-spotted with gold. They were hounds from Faeryland, those two, and had blood of enchantment in them and more than human wisdom. Quietly the hounds stole from the palace with Fionn: and through the night those three wandered together, not caring to what place chance took them.

When the sky was pallid with the dawn-whiteness, ere yet the earth had felt the flame of the sun, they came upon a wood of twisted thorn trees, purple-black against the fainting stars. Curiously twisted and gnarled and ancient the trees of that wood were. The wind had stripped the

leaves from them, but every branch was lavishly fruited with crimson haws: red like blood the heavy clusters were. No wind stirred them: or stirred the smoldering gold of ravished leaves spread underfoot so thickly. Everywhere there was silence.

Neither Bran nor Sgeolaun would enter the wood. They sat on their haunches by the edge of it, palely white in its dusk shadow.

Fionn was fain of the wood: it seemed to him that in some dream or vision he had seen it before. Yet he did not go into it: he loitered by the edge letting his thoughts wander in the patterned dark of it, letting his mind tangle in the net of its branches against the sky — such a silence, heavy and weird and motionless, was everywhere; such peace, honey-heavy, strangening the world! The years and labors that had made him fell away from Fionn: the silence stripped him of them as wind had stripped the trees: but like the ensanguined clusters that weighed so strangely on the boughs, there crowded on him memories secret and unaccountable; faces that shone for a moment, voices that called; laughter that echoed out of a country he had loved once: deep-hidden now, cobwebbed with forgetfulness.

Suddenly like the glint of a moon-beam on water — sudden as flame — a silver-pale hind flashed from the wood.

Fionn did not move — for the hind seemed part of a dream; as if it flashed palely there in the youth of the world; in an age far removed from him! in a stillness dearer and closer than life — but the hounds Bran and Sgeolaun started up and followed the hind.

They did not give tongue as hounds do on the track of

a quarry: mute and silent-footed they slipped after the hind — those two whose full-throated baying led the pack! The strangeness of it roused Fionn. He shook his dreams from him, and followed after the three.

He came up with them where a rock-strewn hill slanted to a valley of singing streams all dewy wet in the dim greenness of morning. In that place the quaint companions were. Standing by a rowan-tree — scarlet with berries and thick yet with delicate autumn-gilded leaves — was the silver-pale hind: and on either side of her, like heraldic animals, sat Bran and Sgeolaun.

As Fionn drew near, the hind leaped lightly and joyously a-down the slope. Lightly and joyously Bran and Sgeolaun went dancing on either side of her — fawning upon her, curvetting and capering about her — milkily white and golden against the silver-pale whiteness of her: all of them pearl-like in the dew-weighted grass. It seemed to Fionn as he followed that he was still moving in a dream, tangled and bewildered there in the young youth of the world. Where else could he have known all this before: the silver-pale hind; the strange flamboyant hounds with their curvettings and prancings; and the elfish wan enchantment of the morning.

At times all three, moved by the same capricious impulse, would turn and circle him, looking keenly upon him with a sharp and secret wisdom — as if to share it with him: as if to call back to him a knowledge he had lost. But ere he could snatch at a remembrance they would be gone again, flickering away from him with high joyous leaps and bounds, elusive, like creatures un-mortal — creatures of the air — that scarce can keep a foot-hold on the earth: and in this wild joyous fashion they led him, as it were,

with their dancing and circling of him towards the Palace of Aloon.

The East was gold-empanoplied — for there the outriders of the sun flaunted their banners — but drifts and whorls of mist lingered yet in shadowy places when Fionn and the hounds and the silver-pale hind came — all in this gay progression — within sight of Aloon.

When they were close upon it, the sun was well over the rim of the world.

The bronze plates shone redly on the palace doors thrown open for Fionn, but it was the silver hind that entered first. Lightly she leaped upon the threshold-stone: and when she had crossed it lightly it was not a hind that waited there for Fionn but a slender girl in a glittering cloak of silver; glittering and changing like the silver the moon spreads on the sea. There was so much wonder and joy upon Fionn that for a while he had no words, but his heart said to him:

" *There is no woman living that is lovely after this one: she has every woman's beauty in her face.*"

The girl in the silver cloak stood on the threshold smiling, and Fionn stood mazed and wordless; till Bran licked his hand. Then he said:

" It is in my thought that a queen from the Faery Hills has come into my house."

And she answered:

" I am Saba, I have indeed come from a hill-palace, and it is to ask protection that I am come. I ask the protection of your house — that is sanctuary — and the protection of the strength that is in you, against the Dark Shadowy One whose power en-spells me."

" Protection you shall have," said Fionn, " and if my

sword has not lost its cunning I will shear the head of the Dark Magician from his shoulders! "

" Alas," she said, " no man may slay him, or change him to aught but what he is: and from his power I cannot free myself, or keep my own shape, but through virtue of this house — that is sanctuary! From this house he has no power to take me, if I leave it not of my free-will. And though you have so much strength and virtue in yourself, High Champion of the Fianna, you can do no more for me beyond this threshold than to let me walk in the safety of your shadow."

" This house," said Fionn, " and aught of worth it has, is yours."

" Not so," said she, " I ask but the protection of the house, and leave to shelter in the strength of him that is lord of it."

" White Blossom of Delight," said Fionn, " where you are all things are but shadows of you. Bid me to cross the threshold-stone."

With that she stretched her hands to him, and so Fionn crossed the threshold-stone of his own palace, and very joyous was that crossing to him.

The days and hours that Fionn spent with Saba outshone all other days and hours: outshone them through the long length of his life. He set his love on Saba, and she turned with love to him from the first; so with every luck-bringing observance and ceremony they were wedded. Brighter than they had flamed at any time, flamed the feast candles in Aloon; louder and sweeter sounded harp and viol and low-voiced timpaun; more richly apparelled were the poets, as though Spring had burgeoned and blossomed in a sparse sleepy day of Winter: for all that Aloon had at any

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time until then was as the chill dusk of November to the gladness of June. Saba had no wish to cross the threshold that was sanctuary: nor had Fionn a wish to cross that threshold-stone. Deep in him there lurked a fear that he would not be able to keep Saba: she was life; she was good-fortune; she was the star of knowledge — he would lose her — no man by the strength of his hands or the wisdom of his heart kept these things for more than a short while. He hoarded the moments: he had no more wish than Saba had to cross the threshold-stone of Aloon.

It was so till the men of Lochlann came down with beaked ships upon the fair Eastern coast of Ireland, wasting it with fire and sword. The noise and lamentation of that ravage came to Aloon. Fionn must perforce set out. He called the Fianna together and made ready to depart with his captains and his champions his slingers and his swift-footed messengers and all his men of war. Spears flashed in the sun, banners moved like bright-colored birds, there was clash of sword on shield-rim and the neighing of stallions: but heavier than a casting-stone that barely a champion can lift was Fionn's heart within him. He chose from amongst the most valiant and noble of his captains a company to guard Saba; and laid oath on them. His druids put spells of protection — and poisonous spells of offense — upon the gateways of Aloon; and on the palisaded ramparts; and in the deep-fossed hollows between the ramparts. They poured mead to gladden the earth; they strewed herbs of sweet odor to enrich the wind — and all that Saba might be clear of harm.

Fionn and the Fianna broke the battle on the sea-rievers of Lochlann. They made a great devastation amongst them; they set fire to the beaked ships that were drawn

with their prows upon the strand, and drove the remnant of the men of Lochlann into the churning sea-tides. When seven days had gone, Fionn made an end of fighting and turned himself towards Aloon, going swiftly and with but few swordsmen whilst his captains divided their spoils. He sounded his homing-call when he came within sight of the palace, that Saba might look forth to greet him. But the great doors were thrown open blankly. Saba was not there. A sound of mourning came from the palace. Fionn crossed the threshold like one distraught.

" Where is the queen I left you to guard? " he asked his people.

" Alas," they said, " on yester-eve about this hour there came one in your shape as you came now; and with him were your own two hounds, Bran and Sgeolaun. The queen looked from the threshold. The shape that was you called out to her, and she ran to it crying your name. But when she came close, alas, it was no shape of you; it loured to a pillar of blackness and she changed in the shadow of it to a silver-pale hind. She would fain have turned herself to the palace, but the hounds that were Bran and Sgeolaun grew black and grisly. They snarled upon her and drove her ever further and further from Aloon. So with that black towering Shape beside her, and the black dogs snarling on her, she went sorrowfully away.

" We that watched were as dead men; we had no voice to cry out; we had no power to stir hand or foot — till she had gone! When strength came back to us we sallied forth, and do not think, O Torch of Battle, we left any place unsearched; but how should men that have but mortal wits, that have but strength in their hands and courage in their hearts, prevail against the Hidden Ones? "

The women of Fionn's household fell to wailings; the captains cast themselves upon the ground; Fionn spoke no word, nor looked from right to left upon anyone, but stumbling blindly got to his secret chamber.

Not till the sun had twice risen and declined did Fionn come forth again. It was sore grief to his people to see his change of countenance and the heaviness of his spirit but none durst speak to him of Saba. For seven years none durst speak that name. For seven years Fionn did not blow a hunting-horn or take hound with him save Bran and Sgeolaun, and with them he went searching through the hills and valleys of Ireland for sight or tidings of Saba; but sight or tidings he got none, and never could he find again at dawn of any morning or twilight of any eve the wood of twisted thorns that had such redness of clustered fruit — the Wood of the Silver Hind.

When seven years had gone, the hope of finding Saba withered in Fionn's heart; he blew his horn again and went hunting with the Fianna, and glad they were to have his company.

It chanced that on a time they went hunting on the slopes of Ben Gulban, that great mountain standing prow-wise to the sea where it breaks whitely on wine-dark prom-ontories and mist-swept islets. Ai-noo-al the lucky hound, black as a chafer, was in that hunt, and Derkame, and Deealath, and Gloss. Cunnaun the Bald had long-legged Sharrak; Diarmid the Brown-haired had Farran, in a leash of silver twisted with gold; Keeltya son of Ronan had Daol; Lewy's son had Fooam; Goll had Fothran. Fionn had Bran and Sgeolaun with the three hounds that were next to them in wisdom, Lomair, Brod, and Lumlooa: not a hound of them all without a collar of white bronze or of silver

inset with gold. It was a morning of Springtime, and the hounds were stretched out in their running, giving tongue as they ran, with Fionn and his comrades hard upon them, for they were on the track of a red heavy-antlered stag. Bran was out in front of the other hounds: the whiteness of her against the green slope pleased Fionn, and while his eyes delighted in her he noticed a thorn tree — the one tree on that part of the hill — that was white in every branch with blossom: snowed down with blossom! Its whiteness put the whiteness of red-eared Bran to shame. Proud and noble-visaged it was against the Spring sky: a stooping wind shook it lightly and a drift of petals broke from its royal-spreading branches drifting on the green hillside. Fionn never remembered such a tree to be there at any time.

When Bran came to the tree in the loops and curves of her running, she stood still there; she threw up her head, sniffing the wind, eagerly and keenly sniffing the wind, then all of a sudden she turned and slipped into a narrow gulch that was close by the thorn. Like a flash Sgeolaun followed her: and all the pack went after those two: there was not a hound left on the slope of Ben Gulban!

It was a cause of astonishment to the Fianna, for never had there been a gulch or narrow fissure in that place. They hurried to it — a narrow cloistered valley of a truth was there, and from it came a great outcry and clamor of hounds that were snarling upon each other; and above them all the voice of Bran baying joyfully.

It was Fionn who first set foot in that hidden hollow place. He saw his own five hounds making a ring about a naked child that laughed there white and unafraid in the

sunshine: whilst Bran, Sgeolaun, Lomair, Lumlooa, and Brod kept off the snarling slavering pack.

Hurriedly the men of the Fianna beat back those snatching jaws; and when they had slunk — cowed and malingering — away, Bran stood on one side of the naked child; Sgeolaun stood on the other; and the child between them smiled at Fionn. So in the open doorway of the Palace of Aloon had Saba smiled, turning with a hound on either side of her, that first mysterious day: and as Fionn had stood before her in the sunlight there — mazed and wordless — on that first day, so now he stood — wordless and mazed — before the child: till Bran licked his hand. At that some doubt or ignorance broke in him and he gave a great shout of joy, lifting the child into his arms.

" Saba's child," he cried, " my own son, my Treasure, my Blossom of Delight! "

The chiefs of the Fianna crowded close — never had they looked upon so royal-seeming a child — and indeed to each of them he had the eyes of Saba; and Fionn's proud way of holding his head.

" O Blossoming of Luck! " they cried, " a hundred thousand welcomes to the son of Fionn."

It was a joyous home-going to Aloon; and little by little, as he learned the language of men, the child told of his mother that he had known in no other shape than that of a silver-white slender hind, and how he dwelt with her in a fragrant friendly country heavy with blossoms and branched trees globed with fruit. There was no one but his mother in all that lovely land, and high cliffs shut it in. They were happy there save when at times a black and towering Shadow thrust itself upon them, and then his mother shrank away and was afraid. But always the

Shadow left them and they were happy: till that last coming — when the Shadow did not leave them — when the Shadow stood between him and his mother: and in the louring blackness of it he lost her, and lost that country of blossoms and starry branched trees and everything that he had ever known, and came — he could not tell how — to that hollow in the hillside and to the baying and snarling hounds and to the greenness of the earth.

" My Heart Within," Fionn would cry, " My Share of the World's Riches, you are my little Fawn, Usheen, Little Fawn."

And that is the name he had always when he was man-grown, Usheen, Little Fawn; and he grew to be a famed and noble champion among the Champions of the Gael, and a poet that made lasting songs.

THE TANGLE-COATED HORSE

THE SUN was yellowing towards evening. Fionn, Son of Uail, chief of the warriors and hunters of Ireland, sat on a hillside that had the greenness of Spring. Close by him sat Bran, the hound that could bring down a stag single-handed, and at his feet stretched the shaggy hound, Lomair, and the shaggier hound, Sgeolaun. All about the hillside were Fionn's men, building ovens and setting deer-meat and boar-flesh on spits for roasting.

Diarmid the Brown-Haired, young and slender, lay idle as a flower on the grass, and at his side sprawled big bald-headed, heavy-girthed Cunnaun.

" I am the man," Cunnaun was saying, " that knows the points of a horse. That is sure — as sure a thing as that Fionn's men are called the Fianna of Ireland! I could pick a horse from one hundred horses with one glance of my eye."

" You could," said Diarmid, " and a choice horse he would be — a big-boned slow-mover that plants himself

in the earth every time he sets a foot down: a horse with a back so broad you couldn't topple off him if you tried, Cunnaun. I could make a song about the kind of horse that you would pick:

" A horse so nice
You kick him twice
Before he moves.
A horse with hooves
Like water-vats.
He has an ear that flops
A high back-bone that drops
A tail for switching flies
He can't run when he tries,
Bald Cunnaun's horse."

" You think yourself clever, Diarmid the Brown-Haired," said Cunnaun, " because you're long-legged and lath-like and a good runner, but the brown hare goes quicker for his size and the daddy-long-legs is more slender of body than you are. I was slender of body myself when I was your age, and as for horses — "

" As for horses," said Diarmid,

" If a horse you want
To sweat and pant
To jib and veer
When work's to do,
To rear and hoyse
Just pick the choice
Of Cunnaun here
You'll never rue
Bald Cunnaun's choice."

Diarmid chanted this ditty in a high lilting voice and at the end of it he neighed like a horse. A high screaming unearthly terrible neigh answered him. It was as if a hundred horses neighed with one ghostly voice. Diarmid jumped to his feet, Cunnaun lumbered up, every head on the hillside craned in one direction. Coming towards them was a big shambling loose-jointed tangle-coated horse: and walking step for step with him was a big shambling loose-jointed tangle-headed man. Every time the man put a big flat foot down, the earth shook: and every time the horse put a big flat foot down, the earth shook a lot more.

"Don't hurry yourself, my Jewel," said the big man to the horse, "we must have a shape of comeliness on ourselves when the great chief, Fionn, the son of Uail, sets eyes on us."

"Who are you to have the name of Fionn, the son of Uail, in your mouth," cried Cunnaun, "speaking it in the hairy villainous ear of a brute that's your blood-cousin in ugliness!"

"Keep the rough edge of your tongue off my horse, bald man," said the stranger. "If he took notice of you at all he would think you too big for one bite and too little for two: if he raised one foot to you, you wouldn't stop spinning through the air till you landed like a wisp of nothingness in a country that you never heard the name of even!"

"Go your ways to Fionn," said Cunnaun, "you and your brute."

Forward trampled that horse and man to where Fionn was sitting, and Cunnaun and Diarmid moved themselves into ear-shot; so did everyone else.

" Fionn, son of Uail," said the big man, " it is noised about the edges of the world that never yet have you put refusal on prince or churl that came a-begging to you for a meal's meat and a day's work. I am asking you to give myself and my horse here, a meal's meat and a day's work."

" What work can you do? " asked Fionn.

" I am not skilled or unskilled in work. I have but one gift to make-vaunt-of: I am the laziest serving-man in the whole wide world! If you searched through all the sea-depths, you could not find a lazier; if you reached your hand to the sky, you could not pluck a lazier out of it. That is the one gift I have, Fionn."

" Mayhap," said Fionn, " your horse does work for two."

" Work is it? There's many a foolishness that horse has, as close to him as his own bones, but the foolishness of work he never had — and I never urged it upon him, for think now: a man might be blossomed in silver and fruited in gold but what's that to him if he has a kitthogue of a wife, and what source of delight would it be to my Treasure here to have the laziest master in the world if he weren't free himself to keep the moon of midnight and the sun of noon-day dancing to the whimsies of his mind? "

The horse leered and winked at his master with one of his yellow vicious eyes, and his long yellow teeth made a snap at the head of the nearest of Fionn's men. The man leaped aside just in time.

" It will task me," said Fionn, " to measure a day's work for you and your companion, but a meal's meat I can give you without stint."

" O Fionn," said the big man, " may your shadow never grow less; may you have kine knee-deep in a thousand

meadows; may all the bees in Ireland gather honey for your mead-vats, for it is you that will be acclaimed the Candle of Generosity when I and my Treasure have eaten a meal's meat! "

" I'll warrant me," cried Cunnaun, " that you can eat all before you as the darkness eats a hillside — and be the leaner for it! From cavernous emptiness comes loud-mouthed boasting."

The big man turned to his horse. " Shut fast your ears, O incomparable One," he said, " shut fast your ears against the niggard words of this man. He would begrudge you the dewdrop on a blade of grass, and you wouldn't get a mouthful the size of a spider's foothold if he had the giving of it, but turn yourself to Fionn here that is the Torch and Noon-Day Sun of Munificence."

The yellow-coated horse swung round and lowered his head before Fionn till his nose touched the earth; then he made a leap into the air, spread all his four big-hooved feet in a kick that went every way at once, and somersaulted and catapulted and buck-jumped towards a green hollow place of young sweet spring grass. Cunnaun's horses were in that hollow place, and almost before he could clap palms together or let cry one " Ochone! " that horse was on them like a thunderbolt and all about him was a biting, kicking, swirling whirlwind of hair and hooves and flashing teeth. Cunnaun spun hither and thither like a leaf in a storm, waving his arms and shouting:

" Ochone! Ochone! My horses! my horses! Call your lean-ribbed brute out of my pasture: call him, or I'll break every bone in his body! "

" Call him out, yourself, bald Cunnaun. My mind is filled with the thought of oxen roasted whole and wild

boars stuffed with garlic and haunches of venison and vats of mead: not for a trifle would I roughen my tongue that is honeyed now with expectation. Your tongue is edged, Cunnaun. Call him, yourself."

Cunnaun seized a boar-spear and hurled himself down the hill-slope. Soon he was thrusting terribly at the tangle-coated horse: thrusts that should have been gashes and deathly wounds to him, but the point slid off and left the beast unhurt — not a thrust of them all knocked a hair out of his hide! Cunnaun gathered his strength for one mighty thrust. The spear-point slid from that shaggy shoulder and glanced along the bony ribs: it did not even leave a scratch there! It just seemed to tickle the yellow horse, for he stopped snapping and kicking and turned round to look at Cunnaun. He winked at him first with one eye and then he winked with the other eye and all the while he smiled, and smiled, and smiled, till his face was nothing but a smile. Cunnaun hit him one last resounding smack, and the boar-spear fell in two halves.

"It's a demon he is," cried Cunnaun, "or a dragon maybe from under the sea, or a piast that tried to put the shape of a horse on himself! O the black hour of misfortune that brought him on us and we with no thought at all of the like of him. He'll eat Fionn out of house and home! O my grief and my sorrow for the boar-spear, the good trusty boar-spear that I've splintered on him!"

"Try kindness," said Diarmid, "and honeyed words: there is great power in honeyed words."

"Try them yourself," said Cunnaun.

"I will," said Diarmid, and with that he vaulted on the back of the horse and took a hard twisted grip of the

mane. The horse winked with both eyes together at Diarmid, and Diarmid kicked him with his heels.

"Come," he said, "put one foot before the other, and I will take you where you can eat your fill."

But the horse stood still as a stone.

"Young chief," said the big man, coming up. "Do not try to hurry my Treasure. He is one that cannot be hurried. He must have time to sort his thoughts and he must feel the weight of a rider on his back before he moves a foot. You are no more to him than a fly, but let the warriors of Fionn sit astride of him from neck to tail, the tallest and the heaviest warriors. Then he will move."

Diarmid let himself down to the earth lightly, his fingers still knotted in the mane.

"Cunnaun," he said, "put your weighty limbs on this horse, and let the sixteen that come nearest to you in girth do the like by him. It may be that he will feel the bulk of a rider."

"Is it humor him?" cried Cunnaun. "If you bribed me with half the world, I would not put myself astride of that bare scraggy ill-jointed back-bone."

But warriors of the Fianna mounted till seventeen of them sat from head to tail. They took a tight grip with their knees. They drummed bountifully with their heels. The horse stood stock-still.

"You cantankerous splay-footed Image of Misfortune," cried Cunnaun, "does it task you to start without the weight of deep-chested Cunnaun? Stir yourself, you Drone!"

As he spoke he grasped the tail of the shaggy-coated horse and swung his weight upon it.

Deliberately the horse lifted hoof after hoof, and deliberately he set them down. He moved slowly at first as a swan moves when it leaves the water, balancing itself on its webbed feet. Then with a jolt, he quickened his pace till his riders rattled one against another like dried sticks in a high wind: and again he quickened his pace. Cunnaun thought it time to loose his grip, but his hands refused: they clung to the tail of their own accord! And the horse quickened and quickened his pace, and the knees of the riders clung to him: and the riders were shaken, as barley is shaken on the winnowing floor, till there was no strength left in them. And Cunnaun swung at the tail till there was no strength left in him. When that horse came to a river, SPLASH! he was into it and over. When he came to a slanting hillside, B-R-R-R! he thundered down it. GALLUMPH! GALLUMPH! he went across the valleys. Trees raced past him; clouds raced past him; the sky itself raced past him, reeling: and behind him the warriors of Fionn raced, and Fionn himself raced, and all the hounds raced, panting and reeling as they ran.

At last a brightness appeared on the horizon, a level shining brightness, a brightness that moved glitteringly.

" The sea will stop them! " cried Fionn, and everyone drew a long breath and said to himself, " The sea will stop them! "

They could hear the thunder of its surf; they could see the widening depths of it; the runlets of foam at the edge. But the horse slackened speed not at all. SPLASH, he went through the wave-swirls; SPLASH, through the deepening water; SPLASH, SPLASH, through the glimmering wastes of the sea. SPLASH — SPLASH —

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SPLASH, till horse and man and riders slipped between sea and sky and went over the edge of the world.

Huddled on the empty sea-marge Fionn and his warriors looked at each other and at the giant hoove-tracks, part dry, part filling with brine. They had no words, and before their tongues were loosened again they were aware of two stranger youths moving towards them across the wet sands. Those youths were of one height and of one comeliness, and their coming was like the coming of sunlight in a thicket of green leaves: like the path of the wind in a field of silvery reeds. One held a whitely blossomed branch, the other had an axe of green stone socketted in the tooth of a sea-lion.

" We are come, O Fionn," they said, " to take service with you."

" Heed them not, Fionn," cried Cormac the Red, " one servant has snared you already, and these youths are, mayhap, from the elf-mounds: or they have come, mayhap, from beneath the sea-floor to entice us all to destruction."

" Nay," said Fionn, " but I will prove them first." And to the youths he said:

" What skill have ye, and what wisdom wherewith to serve? "

" I," said the axe-bearer, " can, with one blow and one turn of the hand, make a taut seafaring ship."

" And I," said the other, " can follow a trail over the sea and under the sea."

" Ye have come," said Fionn, " in a good hour. Make for me now a taut seafaring ship, and when I and those with me have embarked, urge her forward on the trail that is lost here in sea-spume."

The axe-bearing youth stooped and lifted a piece of

driftwood from the beach; he struck the green stone axe upon it and flung it with one turn of his hand out on the waters. It lit there, as a seagull alights, and spread itself till it was a goodly seafaring ship. In the prow of it stood the lad with the silver branch.

" Aboard! " cried Fionn dashing into the surf.

" Aboard! Aboard! " shouted the Fianna, crowding into the sea, and soon they were swimming like otters and climbing over the sides of the ship. Steadily then, she moved forward: and through the dusk and through the hours of the night the lad in the prow followed the trail.

At dawn the ship came to rest under a cliff on the sheltered side of an island. The water there was colored like an emerald, and the stone of the cliff was like silver: and like white silver it mirrored itself in the quiet waters. A path wound upwards dizzily, in loops and zigzags, and over the edge of the cliff leaned flowering shrubs and trees with branches green as jade, and in the branches bright-hued birds fluttered and called to each other.

" The trail touches land here," said the lad in the prow, " make fast the ship."

Diarmid was first to leap ashore. Bran, the hound came next. Soon Fionn and his warriors were climbing hand and foot, scrambling up the zigzags of the path. When they came to the top they found themselves in a forest of very ancient trees, and all the ground underfoot was starred with blossoms. On the twisted boughs of those ancient trees hung globed fruits, redder than pomegranates, and the air was heavy with their fragrance. Some of the warriors would have plucked them but the lad with the axe said:

" Do not reach a hand to these fruits; they are enchanted, and if you eat of one you will forget your father's home and your own country and your lovers there: and you will remain forever in this forgetful island."

And when they had walked for a great while in that forest and foreborne the fruits, they came, all of a sudden, upon an open space of delicate close-growing grass. In the midst was a lake like the blue out-stretched wings of a butterfly, and in the sun-dazzle by the marge stood a youth. He had a cloak the color of lapis lazuli, broidered with strange flowers and uncouth beasts. His hair was bound with a fillet of silver inset with ruby stones, and fell straight on either side of his face: it had a silvery brilliance as of falling waters.

" I greet you, stranger youth," said Fionn, " and would ask you for tidings."

" Ask naught of me," said the youth, " till a youth from your following, of one height and growth with myself, wrestles victory from me."

At this Diarmid the Brown-Haired stepped forth.

" I am of one height and of one growth with you," he said, " and may sun and wind and the deep-rooted earth give me the victory! "

They wrestled on the fine close-growing grass and it was a joy to the Fianna to look upon them: for in this wrestling there was swiftness as of hawks contending in mid-air; there was lithe alert sinewy grace and there was tough endurance. At times one, at times the other, had the upper hand in sturdiness and mastery. So, for long, and long, they contended. It was a cause of wonder to the Fianna that anyone should outmatch Diarmid, for he had been trained in wrestling by Angus Ogue — Angus the

lovely laughing god who wanders the marts of the world and the by-ways, eternally young.

The shadows of the ancient trees lengthened on the fine grass, the lake made a little singing murmur. Diarmid, locked with his antagonist, bore heavily on him so that he tottered.

"The luck of Angus to you, Diarmid; the luck of Angus!" shouted the Fianna, and at the shout the stranger youth laughed and wound himself about Diarmid and leaped with him into the lake!

Wound together, they sank without commotion as a stone sinks. Diarmid's comrades, stock-still, watched the ripples widening on the empty waters.

"It is a grip of death and drowning," said Cormac the Red.

"Nay," said Fergus the Handsome, "Diarmid swims like a seal: he will come to the surface."

They watched for him — and the ripples widened slowly on the empty waters.

"A marvel," cried Fionn, "a marvel! The lake itself is sinking! Look! it is sinking into the earth!"

It was indeed sinking and sinking into cavernous depths; and leaving hollow mysterious spaces that deepened and deepened till the lake was far below them, glittering dimly.

Down they clambered through wan levels and from ledge to ledge; and as they climbed they had twilight about them and through the dusk they were aware of strange things — unicorns milky-white and white stags with branching horns of gold and trees with leaves of silver and crimson fruits.

And all the while the waters of the lake receded and receded. They gathered and globed themselves, moving with

a soft radiance like a moon that had lost itself in this enchanted land and was burrowing a cave to hide in: and the Fianna climbed downwards through the dusk, and the moon that was a lake grew brighter, globing itself and glittering with frosted fire, till their eyes were dazzled by it, and suddenly Fionn cried out:

" This is no lake, glittering, but a palace: we have come now, of a surety, to the Land-Under-Wave — Mananuan's country! "

Each man looked then, with all the strength of his eyes, and saw the palace as it had been carved of one great crystal stone, rearing itself in towers and pinnacles: fantastic as a moon-bubble. Scarcely had their minds taken the wonder of it when they found themselves close upon the palace-threshold.

" A hundred thousand welcomes to Fionn, and the Fianna of Ireland," cried laughing voices, and all within there crowded a folk of such rainbow beauty that it seemed as if the light of the palace came wholly from them: they were like jewels or like stars.

" Greetings to you, Folk of the Gods of Dahna," said Fionn, " and greeting to him who is Silver Flame in the Land-Under-Wave. Fate, or good fortune, has brought me hither, seeking Diarmid the Brown-Haired."

Silver Flame, that was king there, came forward till he stood on the palace-threshold. Tall of stature was Silver Flame, and slender: and he outshone the others as Sirius, the Plumed Dancer, outshines the star-flocks.

" Fionn," he said, " Pulse of my Heart, you are welcome — and long expected! I have besought you many times, and my folk here have besought you, to come to the Land-Under-Wave."

" And I have refused," said Fionn, " because the green grass held my feet, and my hands had wherewithal to keep them busy on the ridge of the world."

" Yet through the ridge of the world we reached to you, and with every heart-throb, Fionn, you were aware of us: for every heart of man beats with the heart-beat of the earth; and some day, some night, some hour of the hours, must seek to us. But we, O Fionn, have sought to you, and in the day's work now you come to us. Enter, for Diarmid is here, and Cunnaun, and all who rode the shaggy tangle-coated horse."

When Fionn and the hunters and warriors with him crossed that threshold it seemed to them that after long wandering they had come home: it seemed as if night after night they had known the strangeness of this place in some impossible rapturous dream. Music of unearthly sweetness pulsed about them; it seemed as if they had heard it before the first word learned at a mother's knee.

And as they sat at feasting in this rich strangeness, Silver Flame leaned towards Fionn and said:

" Was not the bringing of you hither, Fionn, a thing well-done, in the lazy serving-man and the shaggy-coated horse? "

" It was well-done," said Fionn.

" Nay," said Cunnaun, " it was rough unkingly usage. Every son of misfortune who straddled and wriggled and rattled and sat askew — my grief! — on the pitiless edge of that knife-ridged back-bone while that Atrocity, that Tangled Mat of Ugliness, miscalled a horse, gambolled and frisked to his heart's content — every son of misfortune I say — has a grievance against you: and a double grievance have I, Cunnaun, who dangled shamefully at the

tail. When he drove the loosened sods like flocks of birds into the air whom did they batter but myself? Whose countenance but mine was splashed with salt when he churned and trampled the sea-floor like behemoth and a crowd of dolphins and maddened sea-unicorns and whales? "

" Your words are edged with truth, Cunnaun," said Silver Flame, " I will make what amends you think fit."

" This, then, you shall do," said Cunnaun, " you shall bridle again that flat-footed, eye-offending, ramshackle quadruped and set seventeen of your warriors upon him; and find a personage of note and of importance, such as I am myself, to lay hold of his tail. Beside him the lazy servant shall run, and the horse shall splash across the sea, and spatter across the land till he comes to the green hill from whence he carried off myself and my comrades."

" It shall be so, Cunnaun," said the King of the Land-Under-Wave, Silver Flame, " and upon the white horses of Faeryland, Fionn, and Diarmid, and yourself, and the Fianna your comrades, shall journey back to that same hill."

When the feast had ended and they had drunken wine from Moy Mell, the Plain of Honey, and tasted fruits from the Land of Silver Fleece, the Folk of the Gods of Dahna led them forth by a door in a side of the palace away from that on which they had entered: they found themselves on a plain very thickly patterned with flowers.

" Bring forth now, for Cunnaun, the Earth-Shaker," said Silver Flame.

A crowd of youths led out a horse so dazzling white, so beautiful, that he was an astonishment to look on.

" This is a trick," cried Cunnaun, " for here is Manannaun's own horse! "

" Put an earth-shape on yourself! " said Silver Flame to the horse.

The horse stretched his proud neck and shook himself, and there he was for every eye to gaze on — the big, shambling, loose-jointed, tangle-coated, yellow horse! Seventeen of the joyous Folk of Dahna climbed on his back and sat there drumming mightily with their heels; another made himself bulky and baldheaded like Cunnaun and seized the tail.

" It is time to set out, my Jewel, my Treasure, my White Love," cried a loud laughing voice — and there was the big man! Every time he put a big flat foot down, the earth trembled: and every time the horse put a big flat foot down, the earth trembled a lot more.

" My blessing on you," cried Cunnaun, " and may your ride be as joyous as ours was! "

The horse neighed in answer, a high, screaming, ghostly neigh — and all his riders burst into a roar of laughter, rattling on his high-pitched bare back-bone.

" It is farewell now for a little," said Silver Flame, " between the Folk of the Gods of Dahna and the warriors and hunters of Ireland: but ye shall not forget or lose the Land-Under-Wave. We shall be close to you when by the strength of your hands ye win victory, and closer to you in the hour of your defeat. Think on us, hunters of the Fianna, when your hounds bring down the forest boar: think on us when the antlered stag escapes you."

And while Silver Flame was speaking the plain was a-glimmer with white horses. The Folk of Dahna brought out for Fionn a noble stallion bridled with gold and with

golden bells on the bridle-rein: and for each of the Fianna there was a white glimmering steed.

" It is farewell now," said Fionn, gathering up the reins, " to the Land-of-Heart's-Delight, for we must venture and endure on the ridge of the world. O Lords on whom the winds blow never roughly, we will sing you sagas of storm and hard battling and shipwreck when we come again. Farewell, a thousand times farewell! "

The youth who had wrestled with Diarmid stood close by Diarmid's horse, his hand upon the rein.

" Many a time you will come hither, Diarmid," he was saying, " for I have tied a knot of remembrance in the fringes of your mantle, and I will send a steed for you from Under-Wave if you will name your choice."

Then Diarmid bethought him of unicorns, golden-eyed, milky-white, that had slipped between the trees with silver leaves, and leaning over his horse's neck he whispered:

" Send a unicorn for me! "

THE SHINING BEAST

ONCE on a misty morning the thought came to Fionn that he would go hunting. He called the men of the Fianna and they took their hounds. The mist was so thick that the color of one dog could scarce be seen from another, and the men of the Fianna wondered what this hunt would come to: but Fionn had the air of a man not to be questioned.

"My troth," said Cunnaun to Diarmid, "if we were waiting for venison till this hunt, we'd go hungry!"

"There's no knowing what we might find," said Diarmid, "on a morning like this."

"We might find a tree, or a cliff, or a mountain: with our heads," said Cunnaun, "for the matter of that! but it will task our wits to find our way home."

At this moment the mist lifted and they saw the Strange Beast. There was never a beast like it on the face of the earth. Its head was the head of a boar, save for the black twisted forest of horns on it. It had the bristling fell of

a boar; and the body of a glancing stag; and feet like no animal under the sky: and strangest wonder of all, it had on either side of its body a shining moon. At once the Fianna loosed their hounds on it; and scarcely were they giving tongue in a good chorus, when the Red Woman came on them. Whatever wonder the beast was, the woman was greater. She was more than mortal-big in stature; her hair was redder than a carbuncle stone when the light shines through it, her garments were the color of red embers; and her face had a glory of flame, like the sun in his rising.

" Clouds of misfortune and death! " said Cunnaun, " isn't it early in the day that destruction has found us! The Red Swineherd himself would be less to dread than this woman! "

" Call your hounds off the Beast that is out in front of them," cried the Woman, " for I, myself, am following it."

" For no woman and for no man born, will I call off my hounds," said Fionn, " it is my right to hunt on every hill and in every sheltered valley and wide-spread windy plain in Ireland. I am Fionn, chief of the Fianna."

" The Beast is mine," said the Woman, " and for thirty days and nights my feet have followed it; even since that hour when I started it by the Red Lake that is known to you as Lough Darrig. I must follow the Beast till he falls, if I would save the lives of my three sons. Therefore call off your hounds: for to no one but myself must the Beast fall."

" O Woman without sense," said Fionn, " you have no hounds, and mine are the best in the world. We will take the Beast and give it to you to work your will on."

" Loud-voiced and boasting are your words," said the Woman. " I myself am swifter than your hounds. I myself am stronger than the Fianna, and my right to hunt in Ireland is more ancient than yours."

Fionn laughed and cried, " Halloo " to the hunting dogs, that all left him but Bran.

" I will follow the Beast, and cry hounds on it," he said, " and if there is might in you, stop me! "

At that the Woman changed herself to a great and terrible Serpent, a Wonder-Piast, towering up with every scale of her scales glittering like a ruby, glittering and changing with the redness of flame, and a mane of fiery spikelets rippling on her back like a forest of saplings. She twined herself about Fionn; she lifted him from the ground; she tightened her coils till his bones were like to have snapped; and she would have gotten the victory but for Bran that came out of the Faery Hills herself and had strength and power that belong to the Folk of Dahna. Bran made a great leap and took hold of the Piast by the throat: and as hard as the Red Piast squeezed Fionn, Bran squeezed the Red Piast.

" Call off your hound," cried the Red Piast.

" Loosen your grip of myself," said Fionn.

" Be it so," said the Red Piast, loosening her coils.

Bran took her teeth out of the Red Piast's throat. The Red Piast fell to the earth in a glittering heap. She gave herself one twist there, and changed her shape: she became a stream of running water, a tricklet of water, and sank into the earth. Fionn shook himself and his strength came back to him: and there was but Cunnaun and Diarmid and Lewy's Son with him, for the rest had followed the Beast and the hounds when he hallooed them on. And

these three that were with him were as men rooted to the earth, nor could they move hand or foot or tongue till Fionn touched them.

" A blessing on your hand, Fionn," said Diarmid, " and let us follow the Beast, for there was never its like."

" It is a fool's chase," cried Cunnaun, " and we are part of the folly! Did not my heart foretell it? "

But Fionn hallooed Bran forward with a great " Halloo," and all three and himself followed her. It was drawing to evening when they came up with the other hounds and the rest of the men of the Fianna and the Strange Beast. And through the dusk and through the gloom that came after the dusk and through the hours of the night they followed the strange Beast. And always the two moons that were on either side of its body made a splendor about it, and always the swiftness of it was an astonishment; but with the waning of the night the moons began to abate in brightness and in the coldness of morning Fionn and his men were gaining on the Beast. Bran's jaws were snapping close to it, and the other hounds were hard upon Bran, when the Beast shook himself and shook out a great shower of blood upon the hounds and upon the men of the Fianna so that they were red from head to foot: but for all that they held to the hunt, and as the sun climbed into the sky they saw the Beast stagger to the Mountain of the King — that was called among the Fianna, Cnoc-na-righ — and when the Beast touched the mountain there came an opening at the foot of it and the Beast went in. When the Fianna reached the mountain the Red Woman was standing there. She had neither hurry nor concern on her.

" You did not take the Beast," she said, " your swift hounds did not outrun it."

" We did not, indeed," said Fionn, " but we know, and our hounds know, where the Beast is."

" I have that much knowledge myself," said the Woman, " and what is more, I have power to enter the hill. Have you courage to follow me, since you have followed so far? "

As she spoke, she struck the mountain with a druid rod and immediately a great door opened in the mountain and there came forth from it a sound of very sweet music.

" Courage is not wanting to us," said Fionn, " but we are stained and our garments are stained too redly; we would not show ourselves thus in a hill-palace."

She put a little horn that was carved from the bone of a sea-beast to her mouth, and blew a sharp shrill blast upon it. At the sound of the horn there came a huge brightly colored bird from the mountain, singing and fluttering in the air and shaking gold dust from its wings. Following the bird came ten youths that were as beautiful as sunrise on snow-topped hills. They brought keeves of water for the cleansing of Fionn and his men, and garments for them that were as gay to look on as a blossomed field in summer-time. When Fionn and the Fianna had clad themselves in this rich apparel the youths led them through the great door and into a vast hall that had the cool white radiance of the moon in it and the golden strength of the sun. The high vaulted roof was as it were carved from a single sapphire stone that had the blueness of the sky in it. The youths led them through the hall and into a nobler and more glorious chamber where sat a King like a great golden flower, so richly clad was he and so fair to look on. Musicians with viols and citharas and lutes, with harps and timpauns, with sweet-sounding flutes and bagpipes and chiming bells, made music for the King: and youths that

were like bright-colored birds danced and made music with their voices. The Red Woman stood by the King's chair. Her garments gave out a red light as though her body within them were flame, her countenance was too bright to look on, her hair that spread stiffly on either side of her face had the splendor of ruby stone.

" King of the Hill," she said, " this champion is Fionn, son of Moorna of the White Neck, of the Folk of Dahna. His hounds had strength to follow the Shining Beast for a day and a night, and he and the champions with him kept pace with the hounds: will you not of your generosity afford him a sight of the Shining Beast? "

" I will summon the Beast," said the King, " let the cup-bearers bring hydromel for the champions."

The cup-bearers of the King offered to Fionn and the Fianna hydromel from the land of the Ever-Young in goblets of crystal, and the Shining Beast came and stood before the King. The branching horns on his head had grown larger; the moons upon his body pulsed with light; his twisted spikelets of hair made forest patterns on the ridge of his back; his eyes glowed like two coals of fire. He made obeisance to the King.

" Shining One," said the King, " have no fear. I seek but to show you to these champions: from them and from the champions of the world you are safe, for I have put my protection upon you."

The Beast drew to his full height, and fire snorted from his nostrils. He stamped with his feet.

" Take back your protection," he cried, " that could not keep you from making a show of me! I put my faith in my own feet, I the swiftest runner in the world! I am going out in my own strength. I spurn the threshold

of your door. I spit upon your protection and your power. Black clouds of misfortune upon you: and the sting of my words! You that can neither bind me, nor overtake me! "

Out from among them he went, like a flash. The Red Woman laughed and clapped her hands together.

" Your protection is broken, King of the Hill," she cried, " out, out — hound, and champion, and Folk of the Hill: follow the Beast! "

At her word they poured forth: the bright-colored Folk of the Hill; the glorious King; the splendid radiant bird, fluttering and crying; the Fianna and their hounds; Fionn with Bran beside him. Far in front of them the Beast made a brightness, and after him they labored, hound and man; for long they labored vainly, but as the sun climbed higher and higher the shining of the Beast declined and his swiftness abated. There was blood marking his foot-tracks and he lurched heavily in his running. They gained on him little by little. Bran was the hound that came nearest him, but nearer still was the Red Woman, light and swift and radiant; a ruby shadow as it were of the Beast's brightness. When at last he fell it was she who stood beside him. It was in a wide treeless plain that the Beast crashed to the earth: he gave a great groaning cry and died. The sun was setting on the rim of the world and the Red Woman standing there was redder than the sun.

When Fionn and the Fianna and the hounds and the Folk of the Hill came up, they did not see the Shining Beast. They saw a man that had the strength of an oak tree lying dead. His outlandish garments were stiff with gold all thickly wrought to images of birds and serpents and flying dragons. His hair was twisted in a ring of malachite: a

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bush of hair it was, branching in spikelets and curls and knots; and every knot and curl and spikelet was of a different color and had a jewel flaunting and shining in it. One side of his face was white as a bleached bone, the other side was ebon black.

" Keep out from him," cried the Red Woman, " there is venom of the adder in every thread of his garments, and venom in every spikelet of his hair, and in every jewel that he is pranked with! "

The sun flung a last redness on the world and sank, but the dead man there in his lavish adornment shone with a smoldering splendor as if his robes and jewels had fire in themselves. Lying there he made an eye-offending evil-omened brightness.

The Red Woman stooped and lifted a handful of earth: she let some of it fall through her fingers on the forehead of the dead man.

" *Since this King is dead,*" she cried in a high chanting voice, " *my son that is a Poet can make songs again.*"

She let some of the earth fall on the dead man's breast.

" *Since this King is dead, my son that is a Master of Wisdom will have peace for meditation.*"

She let some of the earth fall on the dead man's feet.

" *Since this King is dead, my son that carves in stone and ivory can make images again, of men and beasts and flying dragons — at his will.*"

She threw the rest of the earth lightly on the dead man from head to foot.

" *You that had the swiftness of the wind,*" she said, " *and the untamable heart of the wind — go with the wind!* "

At her word the body of the dead King that had been

the Shining Beast began to shrivel and shrivel and change till it was nothing but a brightly colored leaf, and the wind blew it away. The Red Woman turned herself to Fionn:

" You had a share in this King's death," she said, " and it may be that ill-fortune will fall upon you. For myself there is neither good nor evil fortune more. I go to the Land of the Ever-Shining Ones: and I will take you, and these the Fianna with you, and your hounds into that country where but to wish is to have your asking."

" I would not leave Ireland — the hills and valleys of it," said Fionn, " if your offer were seven times as good. If there is one with me who would go, let him go."

" We also choose Ireland," cried the Fianna.

But Cunnaun grumbled, " It is too many boastful words we have, and our stomachs empty. Had I not truth on my tongue when I said this hunt would be without venison? "

" It shall not be without venison, Bald Cunnaun," said the Red Woman, " yonder is a stag! " and indeed at that moment a great red stag bounded past them, careless of the dogs: and joyously all those hounds cried on his track! Gladly the Fianna followed them in the cool twilight and the hunt went towards the Glen of the Thrush, that is called Glen-na-smole: but when they were come to the dewy river-margin of that glen the stag was still before them, bounding easily, careless of the dogs, and not even Bran had gained the breadth of a pig's snout upon him. A young sickle moon was growing brighter in the sky and shadows were thickening in the glen.

" We will call off the hounds," said Fionn, " it is not wise to trust this valley in the moonlight."

" Well said! my Heart," exclaimed a laughing voice beside him — and there was the Red Woman again!

" Oh call the hounds off," said Cunnaun, " we were

fools that cried them on. There is no venison in this hunt."

"There is venison, Bald Prophet," said the Red Woman, and from her mantle she took a small slender hound that was as white as snow on a mountain top. The eyes of that hound were as blue as gentian blossom, and his ears were as red as the buds on an apple tree growing wild in an alder-thicket. The Red Woman cried him on the stag, and with a turn of his head and a twist of his body he brought it down and left it lifeless on the ground. "That is for you, Cunnaun," said the Red Woman, and lifting the hound in her mantle she went laughing away.

"Fionn," said Cunnaun, "it's many a time I gave you good advice though the wisdom of it was bitter, and now I will give you a good advice. Do not meddle with that stag lest we never have done with enchantments. It is in my thought that when we turn our backs upon him he will get to his feet and move away, easy and careless. It is not at this hour of the night I would care to find myself in the Land-Under-Wave, or maybe in Balor's Country itself. It is not listening to the screaming of witches and headless demons I would be this night — the way you were when you went into the enchanted hut in the valley of the Ancient Yew Tree! Let us turn our steps towards Aloon where there is mead and ale for a multitude. Wild fowl of the marshes will not be wanting to us, nor wild boars roasted with honey and apples, nor the flesh of bulls. Singers will sing to us and candles will be lit."

"Yes," cried Diarmid, "let us go, Fionn. We have a tale to tell to-night."

"What word has Bran on it?" asked Fionn.

Bran rubbed her muzzle into his hand and started for Aloon.

THE HOUSE IN THE VALLEY OF THE YEW TREE

DIARMID THE BROWN-HAIRED bent above a Fenian oven: he had scooped a hole in the earth, had lined it with stones, had lit a generous fire there, and was now scraping out the embers in order that he might roast a piece of deer-meat on the hot stones. Cunnaun of the Bitter Tongue sprawled at his ease and lessoned Diarmid on the art of building ovens.

"When I was your age, my Treasure," said Cunnaun, "I would have a haunch of venison roasted in less time than you take to heat the oven. I would — "

"I know you would," said Diarmid, "and if you were my age this minute you wouldn't be putting ears on yourself to catch the talk of old bald-headed Cunnaun — you'd be leaving the skin of your fingers with the hot ashes: and a share of curses there, too. It's a pity that you're not the one age with me this minute! "

"Troth, Diarmid, it's more than a pity! It's little I'd care about burning my fingers or having smoke in my

eyes if I could be the one age with you this minute. There's nothing on the ridge of the world so good to have as the youngness of youth: unless, mayhap, to have the chance of hearkening to the wisdom of your elders."

"Well, I'm hearkening to it," said Diarmid, "and if I hadn't hearkened to it a while ago, we wouldn't be here; we wouldn't have taken the turning by the narrow valley and missed all our comrades in the hunt: we wouldn't be outcast on a bare hillside with only our two hounds and the piece of venison they brought down in the heel of the day. We'd be sitting in Aloon with our comrades."

"Don't make me think of that," groaned Cunnaun, "we'd be drinking ale, or wine of the foreign Greeks, or golden heady mead in silver goblets, and solacing ourselves with collops of salmon, with teal and widgeon, with roast boar, and the flesh of wild geese. Too well I know it — luck-battered, miserable, unfortunate man that I am!"

"Isn't it prodigal you are with your lamentations, Cunnaun! Many a time you told me that the proper food for heroes was bread of bruised wheat, baked on a stone; and water-cress from the brook. Water-cress will not be wanting to this meal: there is a brook hard by."

"Ill-fortune never comes singly, and there is nothing so bad that it could not be worsened, Diarmid my Love. I remember a night that Fionn had the chance of spending on a lonesome hillside like this in comfort and contentment if his mind had let him be — but no! he must better his fortune by going into a house. We all know how that venture shaped itself!"

"Many a time you promised me that story," said Diarmid, "and now it would be good hearing. You were never a niggard in words, Cunnaun, so begin the tale."

"You shall have the story, Diarmid my Treasure," said Cunnaun, "and may it be wisdom in your mind and a warning. If your feet tempt you into strange houses, bring this night to remembrance and Bald Cunnaun's tale:

"Fionn and Usheen and Keeltya and myself were riding horses, aye, and racing the horses against each other till we came, at the mouth of night, to the long bare hill-ridge that looks into the valley of the old yew tree. And there all at once we fell into a great weariness. We were weary to the bone. The horses were loath to put one foot before the other. 'Let us rest here,' said Usheen, 'we have the coverlet of the sky.' 'It is as good a spot as we are like to get,' said Fionn. We tied the horses together, and were searching for soft places among the heather-tussocks when Usheen spied a light in the valley — my grief! 'There is a house of hospitality beneath us,' he said, 'look how the light streams from the roof.' 'I never knew a house to be there,' said Fionn. 'Maybe it is a house of the Folk of Dahna,' said Keeltya, 'if so we would find friends and kinsfolk in it.' 'Fionn,' said myself, 'have a care! It is not every tree that bears apples, the reddest berries are often the bitterest, and many a fox before this lost his tail in a trap.' 'Old Fox,' said Fionn, 'if you had a tail you'd have lost it the day you sat on that bench in the House of Enchantment and could not rise from it!' 'If I did sit down on that bench of misfortune itself, Fionn, didn't I get wisdom ever since? Isn't it a druid of wisdom and a blossomed tree of knowledge I am this minute giving you good advice —' but it was lost on them, Diarmid my Hero: never burden yourself with more wisdom than you need for your own self. Don't be lavish and princely with

the knowledge you have, for there is nothing gets so little gratitude in this world.

" Down they went, high-headed, and leading the horses, to the house with the bright shining lights, and down with them went myself, old sword-handling Cunnaun that never left a comrade unprotected. I have a nose for ill-luck, and I could smell ill-luck and misfortune from that house, all lavish with light and fine to see as it was. Indeed, barely had we come within the shadow of its walls when a scream that would have curdled the watery blood in a toad came from the house. My feet had sense enough to turn and take me away from it, but the rest of them made for the door like flies for honey, so back went I, in spite of my feet! As we reached it, the door swung open and a score of ill-clad, ill-shaped, rough-looking men came forth and laid hold on the horses, aye, even on my own horse, crying, ' Welcome to the Fianna! Enter and partake of our hospitality.' I smelt misfortune more than ever at that word but I entered with the rest.

" My troth, Diarmid, it was a poor-looking house! The moment we crossed the threshold it seemed to shrink to the size of a hut, a smoky ill-lighted hovel, a place unfit for anyone who had a proper esteem for himself to enter. Enter we did, or rather fall over our own feet and over the threshold, for the earthern floor was full of holes. A half-dead fire smoked in a corner, there was no place to sit down but an old plank that had the few rags of a bed-coverlet upon it. Fionn sat down on that plank easy and unconcerned, but wise old Cunnaun leaned against the wall close by the door. It is a wise general that covers his exit, Diarmid."

" You sat down once on a plank of enchantment, Cunnaun," said Diarmid.

" Leave talking of that; I got wisdom from it, and that's more than you would get, Diarmid of the Brown Locks, and maybe you wouldn't even get a new skin — old Cunnaun got both. He is a fox that can get a new tail! "

" The story," cried Diarmid.

" Well, I stood by the wall and let my eyes travel round the hut. I could see nothing but shadows that moved and thickened and changed; and the fire kept sinking lower and lower. The man of the house crouched by the fire. He was bearded like a goat and his lank gray hair fell about his eyes. He had a shapeless gray mantle wrapped about him, and if ever anyone looked like a goblin of the ashes, he was the one that did. ' If this is a house of hospitality,' said myself, ' there is small comfort of light or fire in it.' With that the shape by the hearth threw on a few warped branches, and the hut was filled with the bitter stinking smoke of elder-wood. Think of that, Diarmid my Heart, boughs of the elder tree that are used for cursing!

" The smoke set Fionn a-coughing and Usheen wiping his eyes, but I kept my wits about me and spied a hag in the farthest corner crouching like a misshapen shadow. When one of those poisonous boughs flamed I could make out her face, one-eyed, wry-mouthed, thin as a skeleton: but when the bough flamed again I saw that her face was as flat and round as the full moon, and it was three eyes that she had! The bough flamed again and I saw that her face was like the face of a weasel. It wasn't till a bough held a flame for the length of time you'd take to count your fingers that I saw she had three heads on one neck! And by that time the other corner was occupied by a being that had no

head at all, but he wasn't without eyes, for he had a big staring socket in the middle of his breast.

"I tried to draw Fionn to a contemplation of these shapes of misfortune, but strive as I might — cough, sneeze, or snort — Fionn sat on the bench easy and careless, Keeltya rubbed the blade of a little dirk that he had, and Usheen wiped the water out of his eyes. The safety of everyone hung, as many a time before, on the wits of old Bald Cunnaun!

"Well, to make a long story short, the goat-shaped gray huddle of bones by the fire suddenly spoke: 'What has put silence on my household? Why is there no music to delight Fionn, the son of Uail, son of Trenmor, son of Bassna, chief of the Fianna, and the noble company that is with him?' Scarcely had the words left his ill-omened mouth when nine headless shapes rose on one side of the room, and nine heads without bodies rose on the other. The headless shapes screamed to the heads, and the heads screamed to the headless shapes! It was music to break the bones of your body: a man might leap over cliffs and drown himself in the sea to escape it: a man might go nine days without food and drink sooner than feast where the smallest echo of it could devastate his mind, but Fionn sat through it, and neither Keeltya nor Usheen wagged an ear!

"'Is it good music?' said the misshapen smoke-begrimed parody of a man by the ash-heap. 'When a house offers the best that it has,' said Fionn, 'no better can be asked.' 'Well-spoken and like a champion,' said the hospitable song-dispensing lord of the house, and he shook a shower of ashes out of himself, getting to his feet. 'I must prepare food that is fitting for such guests.' He went mum-

bling and stumbling out of the room, though I could see no door that he went through.

" Back he came with pieces of tough, stringy, ill-odored meat set upon spits of rowan wood: meat that a starved rat would not put a tooth on! One sniff of it would send a dog a mile away to save his nose from a second! The gray misshapen man set the spits close to the evil-smelling fire, and black and blacker smoke curled into our eyes and nostrils. Rowan-spits and food upon them that was abomination! Trust old wily Cunnaun to notice the rowan-spits! I gave a snort that shook the rafters, and got Fionn's eye at last. I made a sign to him to be wary about that food; but only a sign, for I did not think it wise to draw over-much attention to myself, knowing that I was the prop of that adventure. Fionn showed that he understood me, and it was well that he did for the man of the house offered him a piece of meat on the point of a spit a moment later. 'It is not my custom to eat raw meat,' said Fionn — and I give you my word, Diarmid, that meat was as raw as if it had never smelled the fire! 'Do you disparage the hospitality of this house?' cried our lavish-handed courteous entertainer. 'What I have said, I have said,' answered Fionn. 'You do disparage the house and its hospitality. Naught has savor or value that does not belong to yourself. Mayhap it would be more fitting to offer the head or the tail of your own horse for a banquet — you that are unthankful for shelter and food!' This brought Fionn to his feet and Keeltya and Usheen with him.

" Then the fun began! The Heads that had been snoring in a corner rose in a swarm, gyrating like the balls that are tossed by a conjuror, grinning and screeching with rage

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and snapping at the emptiness of the air. The Headless Ones sprang up, shouldering one another, twisting their ugly bodies and rattling their contorted bones. The venomous three-headed Hag let a screech out of every mouth she had, and took a flying leap for Fionn. It knocked the wind out of him. He was no match for her. She clung to him like a bat. She weighed on him like a mountain. She bit and clawed. She fastened her long bony talons of fingers in his throat, and of a surety she would have been the death of him if myself had not lifted the plank, with its rag of counterpane that served Fionn for a seat, and swung it with my two hands as a weapon of offence on the Hag — swung it, with the Heads lighting on and off me like flies — as a battle-mace and battering-ram against her. Och, Diarmid, you'll never hear again of a fight like that fight! Bald Cunnaun was master of it, swinging the bench like a weaver's beam, playing bat and ball with Heads and Headless Ones. Every blow that I struck on a misshapen fragment drew a yell that went travelling to the vacant spaces of the stars, and it isn't empty-handed that yell went, for the house roared and hummed with the sound of blows and screechings and the hurtling of bodies crashing and falling and spinning through the air.

"The smoking fire went out with a splurge, and we fought in the dark: fought till we reeled and staggered and our minds lost themselves. Years and centuries of time piled up on us and still we staggered and fought, drunken with enchantment and frenzy and foolishness, in a world that rocked about us screeching and blind. We might have fought there till time itself slides into the abyss, if a great voice had not cried out — a voice big enough to belong to a mountain: it cried, '*Halloo, Halloo, the hunt*

is up, Hydramel, Hydramel.' It cried outside the house, and the crying of it shook the earth.

"There came a burst of silence in our hurly-burly of sound; silence that lasted; silence that was like a ragged hole, like a pit under our feet. We fell into that silence; that silence sucked the strength from us; we sagged upon each other, we had no strength to stand upon our feet, we scarce had strength to breathe. We lay heaped together like dead men. Wordless and mindless we lay, till the sky whitened for dawn: then our wits began to stir feebly like the wits of children newly wakened. We found that we were lying on the herbs and thistles of the earth, with the bare sky above us. There was neither stick nor beam nor stone of the twisted, evil, venomous house that had enticed us. There was neither sight nor tidings of the Hag, nor of the Headless Ones, nor of the Man of the House! We saw our horses nibbling grass. We got to our feet, we felt our limbs for wounds — we had neither scratch nor bruise upon us!

"'Is it not a strange thing,' said Usheen, 'that enchantment could hold us for so many hours — and we with our wits unsapped by feasting, and in the noon-tide of our strength!' 'I have known things as strange,' said Keeltya, 'but what brought this happening upon us?' 'There is nothing that comes to a man,' said Fionn, 'but the fortune his own hands have drawn to him. It may be that we have merited such hospitality.' 'If turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to every warning the gods vouchsafed us, is the merit you have in mind, Fionn,' said myself, 'Old Cunnaun's mind keeps yours company.' 'I had another thought altogether, Cunnaun,' said Fionn. 'I was thinking of the Queen's son that got his death amongst us!' His

mind was wool-gathering on that, Diarmid! I tell you, my Treasure, that if Fionn hadn't captains about him like myself, and Goll that is brother to me, his head would long since be under the sod — thinking of the Queen's son! "

" Who was the Queen's son, Cunnaun? "

" That is another tale altogether, Diarmid my Treasure, and there is not much to edify you or to warn you in it for you are never like to come to your death through the blemish that young prince had."

" What blemish had he? "

" The blemish of too much perfection. It is a sorrowful tale, Diarmid — without a moral! "

" I like it the better for that, Cunnaun."

" Well, it has few words to it. His father was a king in the North; his mother was of the Hidden Folk, that ancient race that has the power to go invisible, and he was the one child, the one hope, the one prince of his clann. His mind was bent upon perfection: he would draw to himself all accomplishments under the sun, and all wisdom. To do that, Diarmid my Heart, is to tangle yourself in a net of misfortune: as the king-salmon tangles himself, or the royal boar of the woods that is taken in a pit by the hunters. Follow old Cunnaun that always kept a few faults to encourage his luck."

" Did you ever set eyes on the young prince, Cunnaun? "

" I did indeed, my Treasure! He came among the Fianna to learn of them, but in every art he out-distanced our young men: his running was swifter, his limbs more comely, his voice more full of laughter; and what any champion did with effort he did easily. It was the ruin of him."

" Have done with your riddles and crooked talk, Cunnaun. How could the like of that ruin anyone? "

" It ruined him, my Hawk, for night and day he drew the thoughts of young and old: twisted thoughts of wonder and love, of envious longing, of venomed jealousy, of galling hatred. The gladness of the earth was sundered from him, and the strength of the sun. He died. It was that death Fionn was thinking of — entangling his mind in it: moidering himself — and we all worn out with the fighting we had! "

" It's small wonder that Fionn was thinking of it," said Diarmid, " maybe the Goblin that offered you hospitality had it in mind as well."

He moved quietly over to his oven and began to take the coverings from it. The smell that came out was good. Cunnaun smacked his lips.

THE KING'S CANDLESTICK

"CUNNAUN," said Diarmid, "have you any skill in the unravelling of dreams?"

"Old Cunnaun is not one to boast of anything he can do, but you need go no farther than myself for a soothsaying in a time of bewilderment; or for the true interpretation of a dream."

"I have a dream for you, Cunnaun, I dreamed a bird with every color of beauty on it came out of the blueness of the sky, and a-lit —"

"Stop!" roared Cunnaun, "this is no day for the telling of a dream, when the moon is waning and withering in the sky and the wind is blowing from the East: and ourselves sitting under a thorn bush with that meagre wind whistling and lamenting through it the way it might be whistling and lamenting through the bones of a dragon that died a thousand years ago and forgot to bury itself! Did I ever tell you, Diarmid, how one time I put the shape of a great powerful bird on myself and took Fionn out of

captivity when the King of Lochlann had him shackled night and day after enticing him from Ireland? Did I tell you how I made small pieces of the warriors of Lochlann and left them so destroyed that a starved raven wouldn't go among them for the second bite? I beat down the rafters in the feast-hall with my wings, I tore the hammered shields and the twisted brazen armor with my beak."

" I know you did, Cunnaun, it's many a time that you told me that story. You had a beak of iron longer than the length of a man's body; and talons of adamant; and so many rainbow plumes and feathers that the King of Lochlann's daughter fell sick of longing for a sight of the country that you came from! "

" You have a good memory, Diarmid my Heart; store it with hero-songs and tales of high deeds. And for a tale of a rescue that is none worthier of remembrance than that rescue from Lochlann. Even Keeltya, that made a candlestick of himself and outfaced so many things, could not boast against Cunnaun."

" That is a tale you never told me, Cunnaun. How did Keeltya turn himself into a candlestick? "

" Simply enough, my Treasure — by holding a candle! It was the time when Fionn was prisoner in Tara under the wrath of the High King. That was a woeful time for all of us; and many a trick and stratagem we tried, and many a hard blow we struck, in the hope of freeing him: or even getting a word with him. Keeltya made a great slaying, and so did Goll: and old Cunnaun cudgelled his wits, all to no purpose. At last a thought came to Keeltya. Keeltya is that kind of lean, brown, lank-limbed man that can outrun a deer. His mind is constantly turning and

reaching out after things and rising up in the air with them like the wind that swirls the sand and leaves and motes of dust, lifting and turning them and scattering them in the the nothingness of the sky. So in the end a thought came to Keeltya. He put the garb of a merchant from overseas upon himself, and set out for Tara with ear-rings in his ears: and wine-skins loaded on a string of bony jades of horses that had the look of having travelled the high ridges and valleys of the world.

" Whether it took him a long time or a short, he stayed in Tara till he enticed into his power one of the men whose duty it is to stand by the King's chair and hold the big waxen candle that is lit only for a king. Keeltya tied up his man, stripped the clothes off him, and put those clothes on himself. Then he went boldly into the palace and took duty as candle-bearer. He had feasted in Tara, and knew the ceremonial way of standing and holding the candle, and I tell you, Diarmid my Treasure, it was no joke to stand and hold that candle, heavy as it was, and huge as it was: and tiring as the ceremonial attitude was, that the Master of Ceremonies had copied in his mind from some old carving or painting on a wall where those that kept it could not tire in a thousand years. Men took it in relays to stand and hold that candle.

" Well, Keeltya had the first turn of the night, and he stood there with his face like a wooden image and his body stiff in the ceremonial attitude; but for all that, the King looked sharply at him more than once, and after a while he said to Fionn, ' It seems to me, Fionn, that I see the two eyes of Keeltya shining in my candlestick! ' Now if Fionn had a nose for events — like myself — he might have smelt out something; but he is a simple-minded man, my Treas-

ure, one who swords his way through every adventure. He cast an eye on the wooden-faced image that Keeltya had made of himself and said: 'Look for Keeltya elsewhere, O King. In no palace of the world's palaces, and for no king that draws the breath of life would Keeltya stand as a serving-man.' For Keeltya, you must know, has kinsfolk among the Folk of Dahna, like Fionn himself: and indeed if he were first cousin to the Dragon that lives in the Sun he could not go with a prouder walk. 'Have it your own way, Fionn,' said the King, and he took no further notice of Keeltya.

"And Keeltya stood there with the flame of the candle in his face, and his face like a mask, till the time came when a man should relieve him. Then the King said, 'Change is irksome. This candle-bearer pleases me well. Let be!' So Keeltya stood there, stood motionless with that giant candle, till the time came again when a man should relieve him. And again the King said, 'Change is irksome. This is no ordinary candle-bearer, I will not treat him as a common man. Let be!'

"And Keeltya stood there.

"The cup-bearers filled the King's crystal goblet with wine, and of a sudden, with a twist of his hand, the King flung the wine in Keeltya's face. 'The candlestick has held the candle too long,' he said, 'it needs cooling!' The red wine splashed on Keeltya's wooden-imaged face and on his straight yellow robe. Some of the young lords laughed aloud. 'Aye, laugh,' cried the King. 'Empty-pates, laugh and scream with laughter like a scattering of gulls about a dead herring! There is not one of you would do for love of me what this sword-swinger has done for love of Fionn.' And turning to Keeltya he said: 'What re-

quest have you in mind to ask of me, Keeltya MacRonan?' 'I would ask, O King, what thing you will take in exchange for the liberty of Fionn.' 'If I said I would barter him for the sun out of the sky, could you reach a hand and pluck it thence?' 'I could do all that a man may,' said Keeltya, 'no king should ask more.' 'Keeltya,' said the King, 'hand that candle to the loudest laugher and stand here in front of me. You have raided my territories and slain my people: will you take my friendship instead of the liberty of Fionn?' 'I will not,' said Keeltya. 'Then,' said the King, 'I will set out his price for you. You can outrun the high-headed red stags they say, and you have a kinsman who can charm the birds and the stars from the sky. Bring to me here in Tara a pair of every bird and beast that Ireland has; I will give Fionn his liberty in exchange for the sight of them.' 'Win blessing and victory, O King,' said Keeltya, 'you shall have a sight of them if life and the strength of my limbs do not fail me.' 'You have a brave heart, Keeltya,' said the King, 'and since you are here, go over now to where Fionn is and change words with him, for I'm thinking it will not be in a day and a night or with one turn of the hand that you will gather the beasts.' Keeltya was nothing loath, my Treasure, to change words with Fionn — and there you have the story of how Keeltya made a candlestick of himself!"

"That's only half a story, Cunnaun. Did he get the beasts?"

"He got them, indeed, my Treasure. For the length of a year he was gathering them, undergoing hardship in marsh-lands and in reedy hollows and dark branchy forests and on high windy places. He had a pair of golden eagles from the peaked mountains of Loch Layney: he had the

little golden-crested wren that sings with so sweet a note in Springtime. He had wild swans, and green and black winged plover, and stately herons from the waste places of Connaught that are so full of little shining lakes. He brought goats from the rocky fastnesses of Achill: snow-white they are, with long silky hair, and horns curved like the sickle moon. He had a boar from the dark ill-omened gulch that is called the Valley of the Black Pig; a boar with a forest of bristles on him and crooked tusks that could dig a continent from its roots! Red-eyed and huge and foam-beslavered he was, and his crine of bristles stood out like an army of spear-points along the ridge of his back — black, bristling, grisly spear-points: venomous — with his fell between them and underneath them redder than grass of the marsh-lands shrivelling for winter: blood-reddened with frost-bite. There was a proud upstanding red stag too from the high mountain-meadows of the West. A man at his full height could go between the forelegs of that stag, without stooping, so tall he was: and two men could not carry the weight of his branching antlers! Badgers there were, and foxes, and gaunt gray wolves, and otters, and the little folk that burrow in the earth or climb among the tree-tops swaying against the sky. He had a white wild bull, heavy-horned and fierce; he had a black stallion; he had a ram with crimson fleece.

"He even went beyond what a man should do, and brought a Cat from the Cave of Cruachan: one of those strange sacred hidden beasts that are led forth by the druids at festivals of the moon; and at festivals of the Star, Sirius — the Plumed Dancer, the Candle of the Gods of Dahna. Larger than a three-month's foal that beast was, all silver-pale and splotched with gold and bronze

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and ebon-black; his claws were like polished onyx stones, his eyes were greener than the first leaf-buds of Spring: and never till then had the daylight affronted him.

" There was a sleek sea-beast from the pool at Moytirra — indeed, Diarmid, if I were to go on telling you of the birds and the animals that Keeltya had and the places he got them in, you would have more than your fill of listening to old Cunnaun! But as to how he got them to Tara there is no one but Keeltya himself that knows, and he never told the secret of it. Maybe the Folk of Dahna that were kin to him herded them — maybe he had a strong magic of his own — but bring them to Tara he did, and herd them and shepherd them and drive them he did into the house on the shaven lawn that the King had given to shelter them. That house had nine doors; and it's Keeltya that was stricken and heart-scalded minding the fastenings of every door, and waiting for the sun to top the world, and for the High King of Ireland to show himself. For show himself the High King must, every day of the year, with a gathering of his druids and his poets and his nobles, before the uprising of the sun: to hearten the sun, to gladden him with ranns and incantations and stately gestures — for that, the King must show himself in Tara — to hearten the rising splendid-omened ruby-visaged sun, with the curled and twisted trumpets of bronze making a thunder about him, with the flames of the hill-fires licking the air, and the cries of the druids going up like birds that shake themselves in their cohorts and batallions and companies loose from the earth.

" Keeltya cast an eye, ever and again, on the ceremonial gate of the palace: indeed he was weary of casting an eye on it; and counting, to ease his mind, the panels of red and

white bronze that have birds and dragons carved on them. He was weary of searching the sky for the horse-boys of the sun; but all at once the gate swung open, and king and druid and poet and prince and ollave and brehon — all the august procession — poured out like a multi-colored river. Keeltya let them get a foothold on the lawn. He saluted the King. He made obeisance to the Earth. He flung the doors and fastenings from the house: and out and up — whirring; nichering; screighing; with a crash and a flap; with a flittering and twittering; with a howling, yowling, growling, and a yapping and a yipping; with a roaring, bellowing thunder, the pent-up world of creatures unloosed itself. In their tumult and in their multitudes they burst forth: swans, and swallows, and hawks, and larks, and ravens, and owls — every little and big bird — rising into the air, each bird crying it own cry; and the beasts — jostling one another — stamping and pawing and clawing, tearing and shaking the earth. The sky was clouded with wings; the earth was frantic with beasts; the world rocked and shouted and moved from its place!

" I tell you, Diarmid my Heart, it was a spectacle to furnish and to gladden the memory: the sun must have laughed a-loud with side-shaking laughter — but the beasts — my grief — had no eyes for a sight of themselves!

" The ram catapulted amongst the notabilities. He was everywhere: so was the bull. The boar tusked a path for himself. The red stag gave a sky-high world-despising bound and landed in the turmoil of the musicians: and 'tis he that was tangled up with them for a while — that lord of branching horns — with no pleasure to himself: and 'tis they that were scattered and battered like leaves when the wind shows his strength on them; the goat from Cruachan

flashed hoof and horn and away — away to the hills — with his yellow eyes and his twisted smile and his dancing feet; the sturdy badger thrust between the legs of the Master of Ceremonies and brought him — crash — to the earth: and as for the Royal Cat of Cruachan — that had no right ever to be there — he made for the first druid he could see, and with one spring and one jerk, swung that personage across his shoulders and set off for Cruachan. It was a rout, and a helter-skelter flight, and an evacuation of territories: it was a hurly-burly of beasts and men!

" The King saw more of the devastation and consternation and discomfiture of his people than he did of the birds and beasts, but he laughed and made a jest of it. And it's many a quip and jest were made afterwards about ' Keeltya and his Musicians,' ' Keeltya and his Rabblement,' ' Keeltya and his morning orisons to the Sun,' but the King kept his word and gave Fionn his liberty.

" There's the whole story now for you, Diarmid my Heart. And I'm thinking that if I were less of an old fool, and you were less of a young one, we wouldn't be sitting under this thorn tree with the wind nipping and snapping at the calves of our legs the way it is. We'd be sitting in Aloon where broidered cloths keep the wind in subjection."

" Maybe we would, Cunnaun, or maybe we'd be stravaguing the world on some hunt, or foray, or quest: and I losing a good story! May luck be with the teller — and with the thorn tree that sheltered him."

KING UNDER WAVE'S DAUGHTER

STORM

FIONN, Usheen, Keeltya, Diarmid, and Cunnaun were walking in single file and picking their steps through the morass that covers the entrance to a sheltered hollow in Achill. They had come to spy out a fastness of the wild goats that clamber among the precipitous ridges of the sea-cliffs. As they leaped from tussock to tussock a sea-eagle stooped out of the sky and circled them so closely and with such nearness that Cunnaun struck at it.

" Harrier of the ocean," he cried, " keep clear of us: we are no sea-folks! "

" It is not well to chide a lord of the air," said Usheen; and, almost as he spoke, the osprey lit for a moment on Diarmid's shoulder and then rose in wide spirals till it was lost in the sky.

" An omen! " cried Usheen, " it should bring luck to you, Diarmid."

" Luck," grumbled Cunnaun, " it's too much luck that Diarmid has entirely. Good hard sense is the gift he needs."

Diarmid laughed, and an echo answered with mocking repetition from the cliffs and from the sea-waves; and while it mocked, the air gathered thunder-clouds to itself and the sky darkened till they could scarcely see a hand-breadth in front of them.

" Let me lead," cried Cunnaun, " for I could find blind-fold the house we built last harvest-tide in the fold of the hills here. The strong stone walls of it will shelter us well."

" Lead, then," said Fionn, " and put swiftness into your limbs, for we are lost if the cloud-burst traps us in the morass."

" Old badger Cunnaun can run as well as the best," said Cunnaun, and he set a good pace to them till they reached the house.

It was a house built to shut out storms, and even to resist an attack of shield-bearing foes. Hastily Cunnaun undid the fastening of the heavy oaken door and soon he was thrusting the beam to its socket from within.

" It is not a storm that will force its entry across this beam," said Cunnaun, " and if we had light now, I'd say we were not too badly off."

Fionn took from his tunic the two sacred fire-sticks that he carried, and turned them one upon another while Usheen sang the fire-chant:

" *Golden Bird*
Hawk of the Sun
Shake loose a feather,
A feather of flame."

Fire leaped between the sticks, and soon the hearth was blazing, for the house had a store of fuel. Keeltya and Usheen drew forward benches from the wall.

" It would be a night to sit by the fire and tell tales," said Keeltya, " if the Demons of the Air were not shrieking in this storm and the thunder choking our ears."

" Keeltya," said Diarmid, " did you ever see a Demon of the Air? "

" I did not, but Cunnaun there could tell you of them."

" It is not on a night like this I would speak of Demons of the Air," said Cunnaun.

And indeed it was a strange and fearsome night. The rain fell in rivers and floods and torrents and lakes of water; the lightning burst in fiery zigzags and balls and cataracts of flame; the wind tore at the house till it rocked on its foundations.

" Look! " cried Diarmid suddenly, " that Face! "

" I saw nothing," said Fionn.

" A Face brighter than lightning looked in at the window," said Diarmid.

" Keep your eyes from such things," said Cunnaun, " they bring you no good luck! "

Everyone sat silent and alert for a while.

" Do you not hear a voice lamenting and crying for shelter? " said Diarmid.

" I tell you, Diarmid," growled Cunnaun, " these things will destroy you. Wrap your mantle tightly about your face and head, and repeat a sleepy song to yourself! "

But Diarmid went over to the door and stood listening. He heard a weak small voice like the voice of a child that cried pitifully:

" Let me come in; let me come in. I am so cold! "

"There is a child outside begging for shelter, Fionn," said Diarmid.

"I think not," said Fionn.

"Listen to it," cried Diarmid, "it is saying over and over 'I am so cold, the rain has drenched me, let me come in.'"

"It is a Demon of the Air," said Cunnaun, "or a Piast from the Black Lake, near by. Shut your ears to it: mayhap it is a Dragon from Under Sea."

"Fionn," said Diarmid, "it cries with so small a voice! You have taught me that the Fianna must never refuse shelter. Usheen by himself could fight a Demon: you could fight ten."

"Diarmid," said Fionn, "if you are minded to open the door, open it. But you must deal single-handed with whatever crosses the threshold. Do not expect advice or help from anyone of us."

As he spoke he lay down on one of the benches by the wall, with a mind to sleep. Keeltya and Usheen did likewise. Cunnaun stood, with the hair bristling on his neck, like a hound.

"I will open the door a crack, and peer through it," said Diarmid to himself. He began cautiously to slide back the heavy oaken fastening-beam, but a blast of wind tore the door wide open: and on the threshold stood the most horrible and fearful Hag that ever affrighted the world! She was huddled in rags, and water dripped in such streams from her that Diarmid felt a lake gathering about his feet. Coldness — icy and terrible — spread from her into the house.

"May the Smith protect me," muttered Cunnaun, and stumbling to the farthest corner, he wrapped his mantle

round his head, and crouched there: dumb and blind to further happenings.

The Hag stooped in the doorway with her head thrust forward, and the rain hissed and the tempest growled behind her. Diarmid felt his knees trembling under him, his tongue was stiff in his mouth, but he drew himself to his full height and said in a shaking voice:

"Fionn, son of Uail, permits me to offer you the hospitality of this house. Enter, if warmth and shelter is what you seek."

"It is what I seek," said the Hag, and she crossed the threshold. Her voice was like the rattling of chains in a dungeon, and she was more horrible when she came into the house than she had seemed to be when outside. The door clapped to, as if a hand had clutched it, and Diarmid felt that he had brought a Demon of some kind into the house. Such coldness came from her that his very heart seemed to freeze and stop beating. He went close to the blaze of the fire and held his hands to it. But words kept beating into his mind all the time, buzzing and stinging him. '*The hospitality of the house: the protection of the Fianna: the hospitality of the house.*' He turned to where the Hag stood in pools and rivulets of water.

"Since it is warmth you desire, come to the hearth," he said. The Hag came to the blaze, but if she did the water came with her so that it spread hissing among the embers quenching them and making the fire splutter and die.

"The house has given you shelter," said Diarmid, "but warmth is more than it can give, my grief!"

"Diarmid," said the Hag, "for seven years no one has welcomed me across a threshold; no one has offered me

the shelter of a roof; no one has bidden me to the warmth of a fire; and though fire cannot warm me I could be warm if you would let me sit beside you."

The chill of her was making Diarmid's teeth chatter, but he said, "Come, sit beside me." She sat beside him: and the cold froze his eyelids, froze the very balls of his eyes, froze his spirit within him till it sank and sank and he knew he was dying. He gripped the bench with his hands and sank with his spirit into nothingness!

After a while he felt that he was alive. His spirit wakened, and he wakened with it. He felt warm. He moved his limbs. He opened his eyes. The fire was blazing on the hearth; it was roaring upward in sheets and sparks and flickering tongues of flame. The moon had flooded the house with a white light that held its own against the hearth-flames; indeed for a moment Diarmid thought that the moon had come into the house and taken the shape of a mortal, as wise folk say the moon does sometimes, for a slender girl stood by the hearth: white as the moon when it is sickle-slender, and all untouched by any color of the leaping flames. She was wrapped in a cloak that made Diarmid think of a sea-wave, and in the moonlight her eyes were green like the sea in a morning of Springtime.

"Diarmid," she said, "I am the Hag that you welcomed into this house. Seven years I have been tormented in storm and tempest seeking one to do what you have done for me. You have lifted sorrows and heavy spells from me. Tell me now, before daylight blinds the world, what thing you would like done for you: and do not spare to ask what thing your heart is set on, for I am the daughter of King Under Wave."

"When we were piling the stones of this house," said

Diarmid, " I thought how fine a thing it would be to build a royal house on the slope of the hill rising from this valley and looking to the sea. Would that be a hard asking, or an easy one? "

" It is an easy asking," said the girl, " when the sun rises he will see the carved lintels and the bronze doors and the glittering roofs of your house: and since it is an easy asking I will give you choice of a second."

" I would like to see yourself again," said Diarmid, " I would like you to be in the house."

The girl looked at Diarmid, and a little smile curled the corners of her mouth.

" Diarmid," she said, " in after years it will be told of you that many women loved you, but I will say the truth about you now: you will care more for a swift hound or a good story to the end of your days than for any king's daughter in the world. I will be in the house."

She turned herself to the door; with a touch of her hand it swung open, and Diarmid saw the purple night-sky glittering with stars, yet when he reached the door with a stride himself it was close-shut and barred from within! He did not unbar it. Fionn, Usheen, Keeltya, and Cunnaun were sound asleep: he was minded to waken them and tell of his adventure but thought better of it. " I will wait till sunrise," he said to himself, and going to the hearth he stretched full length on a bench there and was soon sleeping as soundly as Cunnaun.

It was Cunnaun whose vigorous hand wakened him in the morning. " The Hag! " muttered Diarmid, almost as soon as he got his eyes open.

" She's gone," said Cunnaun, " in a fortunate hour be it told. But a nice pother you made for Fionn with your

fool-headedness, not to speak of the rest of us. Bringing Water Demons in to sit by the fire! "

" She is King Under Wave's daughter," said Diarmid, and he told all that had happened.

" My troth, Diarmid," said Cunnaun, " you came well out of it, and if you are guided by me you will never set foot in that house — if it is there at all! "

" It is there," cried Diarmid, " for now the sun is up. Come out, come out and see! "

Out they all went, and sure enough on the hillside, plain to every eye, was a Royal House, a dune that the High King of Ireland could not have wished to better. Diarmid gave a shout and ran towards it.

Cunnaun turned to Fionn: " There," he said, " goes a good lad that is lost to us! "

" I am not sure of that," said Fionn.

" You may be sure," said Cunnaun, " it is in that house he will be, listening to music that will take away the memory of his friends from him and drinking draughts of sleepy wine from Teer-nan-oge."

" Whoever lives in Ireland," said Usheen, " shares it with the Shining Folk, for in every mountain and in every lake and river they have their habitations."

" Unless we can break the enchantment from him," said Cunnaun, " he'll never make a name for himself in battle, or grow old as a man should with his sons about him. There is but one chance for us. That Queen from Under Wave will put a bond of some kind on him: if we can get him to break the bond he is ours again."

" I promised to bring him up," said Fionn, " as a warrior."

"You have said it," cried Cunnaun, "it is not you, Fionn, who will hold back from the saving of him."

"About the Shining Folk one thing is known," said Keeltya, "they must never be spoken to harshly; they must never have blame put on them."

"It may chance," said Cunnaun, "that through this knowledge we can break the enchantment from Diarmid — and if we don't break it from him it is consorting with dragons and unicorns under the sea that he will be in a short time from this, and we without tale or tidings of him to the end of our days."

THE WISH-PALACE

THERE was sweet music sounding in the Royal House when Diarmid came close upon it, and the wind that passed over it was honied like a wind that has wandered amongst blossoming fragrant trees and over flowering meadows. Joyous and gay as an apple-orchard full of honey were the pages who crowded about Diarmid and conducted him across the threshold of his wish-house. It was plenished as for a king: the walls were hung with broidered cloths, the floors were strewn with rushes and sweet-smelling herbs and buds of Springtime, and in the room that had the seat of state was King Under Wave's daughter. She had a robe the color of a purple water-flag: it was wrought over with little stars; her hair rippled and shone like a silver flame; and if she had looked beautiful in the rough stone hut, she looked a hundred times more beautiful in the palace that she had builded.

"Diarmid," she said, "if there is anything that is wanting to this house do not spare to speak of it."

"I do not see a hound," said Diarmid.

"Hounds there are in plenty," said she, and at a sign she made, a groom led in a pair of hounds that were whiter than the snow of one night. They had collars of white bronze on their necks, set with green and purple stones: and chains of gold upon the collars.

"I would not give my own brindled hound," said Diarmid, "and the three whelps she has, for all the white hounds in the world."

"I will send a messenger," said King Under Wave's daughter, she that was named Murias, "to bring hither your brindled hound."

"Do not," said Diarmid," for she is so fierce that she will let no one go near her but myself."

"I will send a messenger in a cloak of invisibility," said Murias. She clapped her hands and there came to her a dark slender youth that had the look of being of the one age with Diarmid. "Bring hither," she said, "the brindled hound with the whelps that the Lord of this house has a wish for."

The youth gave a twist to the cloak on his shoulder — it was of the color of the night-sky — and even as Diarmid stepped forward to speak, the cloak fell about the messenger and he became invisible.

"He has gone on a useless errand," said Diarmid, but the words were scarcely out of his mouth when a joyous baying rose about his feet, and there was the brindled hound and her three whelps! One whelp was as black as a night without stars; one was blood-red; one was gold color like the sky at dawn. Diarmid gathered up the three whelps in his arms and carried them to the entrance hall where a bed was made for them and the bitch who had followed at his heels.

Diarmid spent many days in the Royal House with song

on his lips and content in his heart: and he might have spent a life-time there if the thoughts of Fionn and Keeltya and Usheen and Cunnaun had not drawn him out of it.

" I have a wish to go hunting with Usheen and Cunnaun: I have a strong wish to see Fionn and Keeltya again," he said to Murias.

" Go, then," she said, " and may luck blossom with you, and luck follow your footsteps in the home-coming."

" Mayhap," said Diarmid, " at my home-coming this house may be thin air, and you, too, be gone."

" I shall not be gone, nor the house, till you have three times in anger blamed and reproached me: if ever your tongue names to me the hag-shape you once saw me in, then it is the hour of farewell between us."

" I will never cast it up to you," said Diarmid, and he went joyfully to the hunting.

Murias, when he had gone, took a beryl stone and looked steadfastly in it that she might know what manner of men were drawing Diarmid from her: and she made a magic to bring Fionn and Usheen and Keeltya and Cunnaun to her that she might break their power. It was Fionn that she drew first, and leaning over the balcony of her sunny chamber she saw him passing close to the house.

" Do not put despite on the house-threshold," she said, " but cross it, and pledge a cup of mead to the luck of Diarmid's house."

" If I cross the threshold," said Fionn, " I must not return empty-handed. I must take a gift from the house."

" Even so," said Murias, " you shall have your choice of a gift."

Fionn crossed the threshold: and when he had seen all the wonders of that Wonder-House, Murias poured mead

into a cup that she had charmed with nine strong spells, and proffered it to Fionn.

" Drink now," she said, " to the luck of Diarmid's house."

Fionn drank the charmed mead.

" Make choice of a gift," said Murias.

" I will take the black whelp that is with Diarmid's brindled hound," said Fionn.

Murias gave him the black whelp. He went from the house: and her wish followed him, striving, striving to break his power!

When Diarmid returned, Murias met him at the threshold but the brindled hound thrust between them and gave a loud sorrowful cry. Diarmid looked to where the whelps were and saw that the black one was gone. A flame of anger burned in him and he said:

" There is little worth in the house and little worth in the woman that could not shelter my little black whelp; the whelp that would have grown hound-big, and pulled down a heavy-antlered stag or a tusked red-eyed boar of the woods. My grief for the little black hound! "

This was the first reproach that Murias had from him: and by it she knew that Fionn's magic was stronger than her own.

On the morrow Diarmid said: " There is a great longing on me to be hearing Usheen cry on the hounds! I have a wish to go hunting with my comrades."

" Go then," said Murias, " and may good fortune follow you like a shadow, and run before your feet at your home-coming."

When Diarmid was gone, Murias put twice nine charms upon her wishing-cup. She made a strong magic, and

drew Usheen to her. As she leaned from the balcony of her sunny chamber she saw him coming.

" Be welcome across the threshold-stone," she said, " and pledge a cup of hydromel to the luck of Diarmid's house."

" If I pledge it," said Usheen, " I must take my choice of a gift from the house."

" You shall take it," said Murias.

He crossed the threshold. He saw the riches of the house. He drank the hydromel that Murias poured for him in the spell-charmed cup.

" My choice of a gift," he said.

She showed him a shining sword that had the tooth of a sea-dragon set in the hilt. " This sword was made by Gobniu, the Smith," she said, " in a palace under the sea: it brings victory to whoever wields it."

" I will not choose the sword," said Usheen, " I will take naught but the red whelp that is with Diarmid's brindled hound."

She gave him the red whelp — and wished a burden of weakness and ill-luck upon him!

As Diarmid came to the house, Murias went to meet him: but the brindled hound ran across the threshold and gave two loud sorrowful cries. Diarmid saw that the red whelp was gone.

" Alas for the red whelp," he said, " that would have picked up the scent when the pack lost it: the swift eager-footed one that could outrun the wind! My malediction on the house and the woman that could not keep him! "

This was the second reproach that Murias got: and her heart was heavy for she knew by it that Usheen had a magic that was stronger than her own.

On the morrow Diarmid said: " I was dreaming of

VB

Keeltya all night. There is no one so swift-footed as Keeltya. I would fain follow the hounds by his side."

"Go then," said Murias, "and may the sun and wind protect you."

When Diarmid was gone, she put all the spells that she knew upon her wishing-cup. She made a strong magic and drew Keeltya to her. She leaned from the balcony of her sunny chamber and saw him coming.

"Will you not cross the threshold," she said, "and drink a cup of the wine of Moy-Mell to the luck of Diarmid's house?"

"I will cross the threshold," said Keeltya, "if I get my choice of a gift."

"You shall get it," said Murias. He crossed the threshold. He moved among the splendors of the house. He took the wishing-cup in his hands. Murias poured into it a wine that was made from the flowers that grow on the honey-plain of Moy-Mell. Keeltya drank the spell-charmed wine.

"My gift to me," he cried.

She showed him a ring that was made of silver from the moon and had stones in it that fell from the stars. "This ring," she said, "has power on the kingdoms of the air, and the kingdoms under the sea. It was made for Bres that once was king among the Gods!"

"I have but one choice of a gift," said Keeltya. "I will take naught but the golden whelp that is with Diarmid's brindled hound."

She gave him the golden whelp — and wished a wish on him that brings destruction!

Before Diarmid reached the house, the brindled hound ran out to meet him. She gave three loud sorrowful cries

and fell dead! Diarmid knew that the last whelp was gone.

" A blast of destruction," he cried, " on the house that could not shelter him: and on the woman who pays me so for the help I gave her when she had the twisted shape of a hag on her! "

A clap of thunder shook the earth and sky in one commotion, and when Diarmid got his breath and steadied himself on his feet there was no house — there was nothing but the bare hillside and the dead hound and the wishing-cup of Murias set about with shining stones and wet still with the wine of Moy-Mell!

Diarmid lifted up the brindled hound. He laid her under a ragged wind-torn thorn tree and piled a cairn of stones over her. He took the cup in his two hands and set off running towards the sea that was making a sorrowful sound in the distance against the sky.

LAND UNDER WAVE

Leaping — scrambling — running at full speed — Diarmid took without thought the nearest way to the sea: mint and bog-myrtle under his feet gave out a sharp aromatic scent that was like a cry. The waning light burned with intolerable greenness on the marshy places of the mountain, and stained the rose and crimson mosses with a redness as of blood.

Soon the curve of the Silver Strand lay beneath him. His eyes searched it even whilst his hands clung to rock or tree-root in the descent. It was bare: no late fisherman disturbed the paling waters, no coracle was drawn upon the Strand. Without a plan, in a kind of frantic hopeless-

ness, he swung himself down and ran along the hard white patterned sand. Suddenly — at the sea-marge — he spied a boat scarce drawn above the wave-lift; a coracle it was, made of cow-skin stretched upon a frame-work of plaited willow rods. The oars were with it as though someone had that moment drawn it upon the shore. Diarmid swooped upon the coracle. He pushed it through the shore-waves till it had sea-room, then he climbed into it and took the oars with circumspection and deliberation: for a coracle overturns at a touch. The sea was calm, and Diarmid rowed and rowed towards the smoldering gold on the horizon.

In a little while it seemed to him that though he rowed with lustihood his boat had a speed that no oars could give it. Already the cliffs of Achill, fantastic and huge, were fading and dissolving in the distance. The waves were growing larger and larger. They were mountainous. On all sides their toppling peaks shut him in. Diarmid had never seen such waves: one moment green as a winter dawn, next moment blue as the gentian-flower of the hills, and again purple freaked with black like the pall that covers a king. Diarmid drew in the oars and knelt in the coracle with his face towards the prow. The moon was climbing the sky, the waves where she touched them blossomed in silver fire: and always the boat flew onward like a swift passionate living creature. Down slanting abysses of water it slid unaffrighted; it moved through cavernous hollows; it threaded its way between toppling precipices. Diarmid knelt dizzied and bewildered: music sounded in his ears like sweet high singing voices, and it seemed to him that faces smiled subtly on him from between long wave-tossed strands of hair — was it hair or seaweed? — that

swayed in tangles of gold and orange-amber and bronze and green. And ever the waves craned upward, shutting out the early stars. They arched above his boat. They made an iridescent globe about it, bubble-thin. They drew it down — and down — to the bottom of the sea!

Diarmid found himself knee-deep in flowers, scarlet lilies chaliced with fragrance. A cloudless sky, green as a crysolite, arched above him: a little way off golden-fruited trees drew thickly to a forest, and between the silver boughs of them Diarmid caught sight of unicorns that moved like silver moons. He knew that he had come to Land Under Wave. His fingers were clenched on the wishing-cup of Murias, his feet were eager for the untried road. He went forward stoutly. As he journeyed the lilies grew sparser, and delicate silvery grasses took their place.

When the lilies ceased altogether he came on the first drop of blood. It was redder than a ruby stone, redder than a carbuncle. It drew his eyes in the silvery grass plumes. He could not pass it. He knelt and took it carefully in the wishing-cup of Murias.

It was where the slender delicate grasses broke into a powder of amethyst stars that he found the second drop of blood. It was redder than the seed in a cleft pomegranate. He could not pass it. He knelt and took it reverently in the wishing-cup of Murias.

It was where marsh-flowers showed themselves, and grass gave place to rushes and tall reeds that he found the third drop of blood. It was redder than the moon when she rises scarlet. He could not pass it. He knelt and took it reverently in the wishing-cup of Murias.

Lake-water glimmered among the reeds. Many lakes

there seemed to be. He picked his way among wet places and presently came to where a woman, giant-big, was cutting rushes. With a mighty whirring sound her sickle cut the rushes, and she tied them in barthes that an ox would stagger under. She worked with a furious haste, and Diarmid stood looking at her for a while:

"O Woman," he said, "I would fain ask a question of you."

"Ask me nothing," said the woman, "till I have gathered my sufficiency of rushes."

"Mayhap," said Diarmid, "you could answer my question and still cut rushes. Is not this country the Land Under Wave?"

"It is," said the woman.

"Have you news of King Under Wave's daughter?" asked Diarmid.

The woman dropped her sickle, and turned full on him. Giant-big, indeed, she was: her hair of a pale straw-color hung like a bush on either side of her face; her brawny arms could have torn a tree from its roots.

"King Under Wave's daughter has come home," she said, "after seven years wandering in torment and loneliness under spells of enchantment, she has come home. But it's little joy she has in the home-coming — she that was the Flame of Joy, and the Jewel, and the Flower of Beauty — for she lies sick and weary of life, and there is no skill in anyone to cure her."

With that the woman fell to cutting rushes again with greater and greater fury of haste!

"Woman without sense," cried Diarmid, "is not the King's daughter of more value than a few stalks of rushes? I would have news of her sickness."

" The rushes are for the King's daughter," said the woman, "she has a wish to lie on a bed of green rushes, like a vagrant or a hunter of the hills — and young stranger lord, if you have skill in healing, use it and win honors and wealth beyond your dreams."

" Bring me to where the Princess is," said Diarmid, " and let me change words with her."

" You ask what no woman and no man can grant you, and it's well for you that no one hears but myself that am kind-hearted to excess," said the woman.

Diarmid took the wishing-cup of Murias from the fold of his mantle.

" Do you know this cup? " he asked.

" It is the cup of King Under Wave's daughter," said the woman. " Where got you it? "

" Where I changed more than one word or two with the King's daughter," said Diarmid, " tell me how to gain speech with her."

" There is only one way," said the woman, " I will put you in the midst of a rush-bundle that I carry on my back, and when I am come into the one room with the King's daughter I will set down the bundle. 'Tis for you to step from it and have speech with the Princess."

It was sore against Diarmid's pride to take the woman's offer, but he repented exceedingly of his harshness to Murias and was fain to see her.

" Let be as you will," he said, " so that I reach to the Princess."

" What have you here? " said the palace guards.

" Rushes for the Princess," said the woman, " and the ring of the Princess to pass me." " Pass then," said the guards. When the woman had come into the one room

with Murias, she let down the barth of rushes and said:

" Green rushes the winds have shaken,
Green rushes my hands have taken,
May healing be in the barth I bring."

Murias leaned up to look on the rushes, and she saw Diarmid coming out of the greenness of them.

" O Diarmid," she said, " if you are not a dream, come over to where I am, and put your hands in mine."

" I am no dream," said Diarmid, and he went over to where she was and put his hands upon hers.

" O Diarmid," she said, " you are come — and I am dying! "

" I am come," he said, " to take the rest of the spells and the sickness off you."

" The heavy sorrow of my sickness is gone at the sight of you," she said, " but the sickness itself is beyond your cure: for every time I thought of you, Diarmid, on my way hither, I lost a drop of my heart's blood, and that loss will bring me to my death."

" I have the three drops that you lost," cried Diarmid, " take them in a draught of healing and be well of your sickness!"

" Alas," said the Princess, " the cure is not so easily come by. I must drink the draught that heals me from the Cup that belongs to the Plain of Wonder, the Plain called Magh an Ionganaidh among men."

" I will get the Cup," said Diarmid, " if it is to be got in the world."

" Luck has blossomed with you until now, Diarmid," said the Princess, " but you will not get the Cup: nor will

anyone. Many champions have adventured for it; and strange beasts have gnawed their bones. Even had you strength to take it, the Cup would be without virtue unless the King of the Plain of Wonder gave it with his blessing and goodwill."

" How can one tell," said Diarmid, "when luck withers! I will not turn from the adventure or show less courage than those others: honor lives when a man is dead. Give me news of the Plain of Wonder, and how one may win to it."

" Naught but a river divides the Plain of Wonder from my father's land: the wind brings the fragrance of it across, and wandering music of it. But you would sail upon that river — small though it appears and a slight thing to cross — for the length of a year and a day mayhap: mayhap until grayness came upon your brown locks, and age dried the strength in you."

" I will try my luck," said Diarmid.

He set out for the Plain of Wonder. The river was little wider to look on than the river Boyne is where the silvery reaches of it go past the mound of the Smith's Wife: in color it was of a pale cold blue, like streams that come from ice-mountains.

" It may be," thought Diarmid, " that I can swim," but he was mindful of what Murias had said and sought warily for a boat, or materials to fashion one. In the hurry and moil of his seeking he was aware of a man who stood waist-deep in the middle part of the river. Red of skin and red of hair was the man, and a red tunic clung about him. Giant-big, and more than giant-big he was, and his eyes shone like candle-flames.

" Diarmid of the Brown Locks," he cried, " you are hard

put to it. Set your foot on the palm of my hand, and I will carry you across." Diarmid, without ado, set his foot on the palm of the Red Man's hand, and the Red Man took him across in a stride.

" Of your courtesy," said Diarmid, when he set foot on the Plain of Wonder, " tell me how is my name known to you, and why have you helped me? "

" You have helped others," said the Red Man. " Do you mind of a day when the waters of the Boyne raged over the ford, and you came to pick your way across. On the bank was an old trembling vagrant who could not dare the flood. You took him across on your shoulders, and he said: *' I swear by The Red Listener that if ever the Gods give it to me to help you in this world or another, I will remember to-day's crossing.'* I am the Red Listener, and the shivering vagrant was the King of the Plain of Wonder. Once a year he is under bonds to leave his kingdom and wander through the world in the guise of a god-forgotten vagrant seeking help at every turn. Your errand in the Plain of Wonder is known to me. You seek the King's Cup. Get speech with him and say: *' The Red Listener remembers the oath.'* He will offer you your asking of a request: it is for you to ask the Cup."

" My thanks and blessing with you," said Diarmid, and he set forward. He had no need to ask the way, for the palace glittered like the sun and moon and all the companies of stars and shed the brightness of itself far off. Diarmid waited by the palace steps till such time as the King was returning with many lords that rode upon white horses. When the King dismounted, Diarmid came to him as one comes who begs of a king.

" What would you? " said the King.

" O King," said Diarmid, " I would say to you, ' *The Red Listener remembers the oath.*' "

" I remember it too," said the King, " though it's little I thought to see Diarmid of the Brown Locks begging at my gate. And come in now, for there is gladness inside."

" O King," said Diarmid, " give me my asking: for one at the point of death waits my coming."

" What is your asking? " said the King.

" I am asking for the Cup of the Plain of Wonder."

" It is not a small asking that brought you hither," said the King, " but I will give the Cup: and indeed the cause of your asking it is known to me." He called for his chief cupbearer, and said: " Let the Cup be brought to me."

The Cup was, as it were, one great sapphire: cut so that it flashed with blue and silver stars of flame. The King took it in his hands:

" I give it," he said, " with my goodwill and blessing: when the draught of healing has been drunk from it, the Cup will return to me; all the champions on the ridge of the world could not keep it, so well does it know its way home."

Diarmid took the Cup with reverence; he made obeisance to the King and turned his steps again to the river. In the river, midway, stood the Red Man.

" I counselled you well," he said, " for you have the Cup."

" You counselled me well," said Diarmid.

" Put your foot on the palm of my hand," said the Red Man, " and I will take you across."

Diarmid put his foot on the palm of the Red Man's hand. The Red Man took him across at a stride.

" You have the Cup," said the Red Man, " but unless

you fill it from The Hidden Well, there will be no virtue in the draught."

" Since you have helped me to the Cup," said Diarmid, " of your courtesy give me news of the Well."

" I could give you news of it," said the Red Man, " but that would help you little. I will do better, I will fill the Cup for you."

The Well was but a glimmer of water hidden among reeds.

" Fill the Cup," said the Red Man to Diarmid. Diarmid knelt to dip the Cup, but as he did, the water shrank from him. Down — and down — and down it shrank as he reached after it, till it was at the bottom of a deep pit.

" Give me the Cup," said the Red Man. He leaned over the brink to dip the Cup, and the water rose and filled it.

" Guard carefully the water in this Cup," said the Red Man, " for it is the draught of healing. Put into it the blood-drop that is redder than a ruby: but when you put it in, you will forget your love for the Princess. Put into it the blood-drop redder than a seeded pomegranate: but when you put it in, you will forget your quest in the Plain of Wonder. Put into it the blood-drop that is redder than the moon, new-risen and scarlet: but when you put it in, your heart will be heavy with sorrow till such time as you come again to your own country — and whether that coming will be late or soon is what I cannot tell you."

" Red Listener," said Diarmid, " the memory of you must soon go from me, but somewhere in my heart, too deep for seeking, will lurk a thought of you: my blessing on you in the youth of the year and in the age of it; by moonlight, by sunlight, by starlight, and in the mirk and silver light between."

" My blessing on yourself," said the Red Man, and they parted.

THE CUP OF HEALING

It was with the sound of trumpets and the music of singing voices and the thunder of horse-hooves that Diarmid was brought to the palace of King Under Wave.

With the lords and princes of the land about her, Murias drank the draught of healing from the Cup of the Plain of Wonder. Gladness came to her and laughter and the light of immortal youth. Gladness and beauty were multiplied upon the Folk Under Wave and the Country Under Wave, but with Diarmid it was as The Red Listener had foretold. His heart was heavy within him, forgetfulness weighed upon his mind: in every laughing voice the hills of Ireland called to him. The beauty that Murias had was but a reflection, pale and troubled, of the troubling beauty that Ireland had — flame and starlight and silence — quenchless, and death-giving.

Murias was fain to break the heaviness of Diarmid's sorrow but do what she might the weight of it increased upon him. At last she said:

" There is no least bit of your heart that does not spend itself in longing for the green grass of Ireland and the faces of your comrades. Where the heart goes, the feet must follow. I will give you the way back to Ireland. You will not think of me at the changing of the lights, or see any beauty of me in the colors of the leaves; but, for me, you will be a song in the sea's voice: you will be a glad cry at the dawn. And farewell now and a kind forgetting of me."

She took her cloak that was as blue as a sea-wave and put

it about Diarmid's shoulders; and when it touched him it became a darkness, it became a rushing mighty wind lifting him with tumultuous strength and joyousness — a strength, a tumult, and a joyousness that seemed to be part of himself. Swirling with that wind, gyrating with it, leaping upwards exultant, shouting with the mighty shout of it, Diarmid lost himself for one long glorious splendid moment — that might have been a year or an eternity — the next, he was standing in Achill Island on the low narrow causeway of rock that has Lough-na-Keerogue on one side of it and the sea-waves on the other. It was a place well known to him: the trout of Lough-na-Keerogue were good, on the hill-slopes one could rouse a deer. The hot fragrance of the peaty land, the sharp smell of the sea, the sunlight on the peaked mountain that rose so sharply — these were things familiar, his eyes were glad of them. He watched a branch of the rowan tree, red with berries, swaying and swaying: he saw the lake like a silver shield, jewelled at the rim with emerald; the sea like an unbroken sapphire. He wondered at the strangeness of the cloak that he was wearing.

"What have I to do with a sea-queen's cloak?" he said, and he flung it out glittering upon the glittering sea-floor. The sea drew the cloak into itself, down — and down — and down to the Land Under Wave.

Diarmid shaped his hands to his mouth and gave the long glad comrade-call of a man of the Fianna.

THE NUTS OF KNOWLEDGE

FIONN, the son of Uail, the son of Bassna, the son of Trenmor, sat by the Tarn of the Shadow within a stone's throw of the Sacred Mountain of Slievenamon. It was Sowan Eve, chill and silent. One or two venturesome stars looked through the dusk. The plain was empty. Fionn's thoughts did not stray there as they might have strayed among things well-remembered: his mind was not occupied with the stars. His mind centered itself upon the Tarn of the Shadow: for there, upon the dark waters — at some hour, some one moment of the night — the Shadow of Sive the Goddess would glimmer like flame. To-night Sive the Goddess would descend from Slievenamon: unseen, she would descend; by unknown pathways. Unseen, she would cross the plain; she would cross the green ridge of the world; and at the world-edge she would lift the curtains of the sky and drop them silently behind her; for, to-night, she would visit the Well of Knowledge, the

Well of the Hazel Trees, in the Country of the Ever-Young.

To-night, the Well of Wisdom, the Fountain of Youth, would be stirred by the gorgeous fins of the Salmon of Knowledge: mightily, to-night, the Salmon would winnow with his fins, and the Well would rise in surges of crimson and purple — in nine waves of crimson and purple — and overflow in five streams, nourishing the stars and the lives of men. Sive would draw water from the Well. She would turn again and pass this way, Fionn knew, to Slievenamon; unseen, and yet her shadow — a flickering brightness — would fall on the tarn close to him; and if at that moment he cried out her Name — she would stay her steps — she would give him a draught of the Water. When it wetted his lips he would know the secrets of the earth and of the places under the earth. He would know what the birds of the air said to each other, and what the beasts said — knowledge befitting a champion and the chief of a great clann.

If only he could watch unblinking till the sun climbed the horizon. Nine days he had fasted in preparation: he wished now that he had fasted longer — hunger prods a man to wakefulness. He wished that he had a comrade by him to change words with, but that did not come into the adventure. He thought of the Well of Knowledge. To-night the Scarlet Hazel Trees that leant above it would drop their fruits upon its waters, and the ripples they stirred in falling, purple and scarlet, would spread and twinkle and vanish where those five streams issued that refreshed the world; and wakened there and rising from the depths, Fintan the Salmon of Knowledge would show himself, jewelled and glittering, scale on scale. Sive would

look into the depth of the Well. She would see the faces of Gods — proud imperturbable faces — down: far down; and tangled stars; and black unfathomable night. She would dip a golden pitcher and draw a draught of the well-water — sweet and bitter — she would lift it shoulder-high and turn her steps again to Slievenamon. To-night she would pour a wisdom-draught for the Gods of Dahna — the Folk of the Gods of Dahna whom age cannot wither.

The subtly-smiling beautiful Folk of Dahna, the Riders upon White Horses: '*Upon their heads they have close-curling golden hair: their eyes are blue like ice: good they are at man-slaying.*' He, Fionn, was kin to them: he had feasted with them: nay more — had wrestled and fought with them. What a night it was when he slew Allyn, son of Midna, and won back the lordships that his father had: while earth and heaven flamed together. What a day it was when they crowded round him: the warriors, young and eager, shouting his name; the champions, sword-hardened, lauding him — Fionn the Warrior, Fionn the Ruler of Clann Morna!

What a game it was — the sword game. A man never wearied of it: and in the end it brought him death with the war-shout in his ears, and afterwards the keening of a warrior and proud burial. Age cannot wither the sword!

It is an ugly, limping, malefic, toothless thing — old age! There is no one who would not wish to be ignorant of it — as ignorant as the Folk of the Gods, whose fingers cannot stiffen on the sword-hilt.

It was Sowan-Tide — the Night of the Laughter of the Gods — to-night. Their palaces flamed to-night upon the heights and windy ridges of the world; and across the far-

stretching plains — wide open. To-night a mortal could enter there: could drink, ungrudged — from vats of mead and hydromel — the golden-beaded heady drink of immortals.

A pulse leaped in Fionn's heart at the thought — and out of nowhere a wind swept down the empty spaces of the night. It beat upon the earth thunderously, it rent the fleeces of the sky, and through it Fionn heard the faint sweet silvery music and the singing voices of the Faery Folk:

" Forget the hearth,
Forget the roof,
Set the wheel aside:
Leave your weaving,
Warp and woof,
Steal out to us this Sowan-Tide.

Steal out to us, our tossing hair
Sets sun and moon and stars aflare.
The racing winds are hounds beside
The cloud-maned horses that we ride.

Come ride with us, have heart to dare
The plunging steed; the steeps of air;
The swirling, high, tumultuous flight,
The aery hooves — this Sowan-Night! "

The Faery Host — plumed with every color of beauty — the Horsemen of the Sky, were passing; they were calling to him.

" Go your ways, Proud Lords of the Air," cried Fionn, " lighter than wind on your bright-necked horses. If ye are wise ye will envy me to-night! "

He struck his hands together for warmth, and kept his eyes steadfastly on the tarn. In some place far away rose the ullaloo of a wolf. A wolf answered it. The night grew colder. Slowly the wheel of the stars, turning, measured the hours. Fionn could but guess how it turned, for he dared not lift his eyes from the tarn lest he should miss that moment, that smallest moment, when the shadow of Sive would burn and flicker there — the shadow of the unseen Goddess that was Flame — it was not in his power to consult the wheeling stars. Slowly the hours passed. Fionn dipped his fingers between the reeds and touched them to his forehead — at that moment the water kindled!

" SADB," he cried.

The silvery flame was stayed among the reeds of the tarn.

Upon the thither side of the water she stood. Her beauty was terrible. Her beauty was like a sword that twisted in his heart. Her beauty like a flame destroyed him. There was no strength left in him: the marrow was dried in his bones.

And she stood there with the Universe behind her, with the Crowned Gods of Dahna rank on rank — and he could not raise his head: could not raise an eyelid.

" What is your will? " she said.

It was a voice so faint and sweet and small that it seemed to be within Fionn himself that it spoke.

Fionn knew that every mountain in Ireland stood alert for his answer. He would fain have cried:

" To see you, to see *You* — only once — only once! " but his tongue refused him, and the sword of her beauty twisted deeper and deeper in his heart. He moaned like a

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hurt beast. He flung out his arms convulsively and fell forward with his face on the earth.

His body sagged limply.

How light, how unburdened it felt to be dead. He had not thought that he could feel so light. What a greenness, as of emerald-stone, about him: a strange translucent greenness that caressed his body — endless, unobstructed, softly-sliding, translucent greenness. He moved without effort, sustained and poised in it. It lapped him intimately, it yielded to every wish. The empty spaces of this world were his: no moon chilled them, no fierceness of the sun burned there, no sprinkled stars. And like the pellucid vastness in which he moved, his body was vast: and in a measure strange to him. The strangeness pleased him, a sense of the mysterious deeps below him filled him with joy. He joyed in himself. He floated in his world; he cleft it with swift strokes; he swam strongly in it. It was a world of waters — swirling, emerald-pale, iridescent. How the ripples of it played against him as he swam: how the bubbles of it danced and blossomed in foam. What a pulse, what a long slow surge of delight went through it, lifting him, intoxicating him. *He was swimming in the Well of the Sacred Hazels. He was the crimson-spotted Salmon of Knowledge!*

And the Nuts of the Sacred Hazel Tree fell on the Waters.

They were like strange fruits, golden-rinded, ruby-hearted, fragrant, wonderful: and as they fell the circling water crimsoned, a surge of ecstasy moved in it, and everywhere a myriad joyous voices cried:

" Exult!
Exult!
The stars blossom.
Wisdom is born.
Exult! "

Fionn that was the God of the Waters, exulted. Beauty flowered in him; Wisdom unfolded. With every surge, with every pulse, with every heart-beat, Fionn exulted.

And still the fruits of the Hazel Tree fell upon the waters.

Like stars they fell, like glittering constellations, like flaming suns. And still the voices cried:

" Exult!
Exult!
Exult! "

But with Fionn it was different. The splendor overwhelmed him; the ecstasy beat him down: as heavy rain beats down the flowering branch, as the torrent overwhelms the swimmer. Those voices that had cried out the very cry of his heart were alien now. He must escape from them or die. If he could hide in the depths, if he could find a shelter in the darkness, if he could be a water-weed in the cleft of a rock, forgotten, he might live — Fionn who knew so much, who had dared so much.

He had but a moment in which to choose. Wide-eyed he made the choice. Gathering all his strength he thrust his splendid body upwards in the salmon-leap. Into the flaming æther, into the intolerable ecstasy, he shot with winnowing fins and thrashing tail: a thousand colors flashed and faded on his scales: he whirled — a splendor — in that splendor of suns!

"*Exult!*" he cried, as he somersaulted, "*Exult! EXULT!*"

The radiance wounded him at every pore. He gasped and choked in the death-agony. He slid endlessly through space, fathom after fathom, league upon league, till the Abyss engulfed him.

THE sun had not yet climbed the horizon. The world was silver-pale. There was a light frost on the grasses, a light snow had feathered the summit of Slievenamon: everywhere there was stillness and cold. Fionn stirred uneasily: he clenched and unclenched a hand. He raised his head: he gathered himself together and sat up. The Tarn of the Shadow was like a mirror of polished find-ruiney. The motionless ash tree beside it was jewelled with crystal in every branch; naked it stood against the violet sky: low down a solitary star burned faintly like a forgotten torch.

Fionn rubbed the calves of his legs.

"Goll would laugh at the sight of me," he said, "Fionn that cozened himself with a dream — like a starved bodach!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed a bird in the ash tree. "Morning-wisdom like the headache after a feast!"

"What thing are you?" asked Fionn.

"I am an Image of the Sun," cried the bird, spreading arrogantly the great wings of a ger-falcon.

Fionn leaped to his feet: strength filled him: life danced and sang in him: his heart beat with the mighty pulsations of the earth: he felt the surge of the Sacred Well: he remembered the terrible beauty of Sive: he heard the stones whispering: he heard the small sharp song of the frost:

and he heard the shout of the sun, advancing like an army with banners.

"What am I — what then am I?" he said, half to himself.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the frosted grasses. "Here comes one who has drunken of the Well of Knowledge. What are we? What are the patterned stars? What is the sun? Ask a new riddle — for once!"

THREE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER

BENEDICTUS the porter was strewing fresh rushes in his little wattled cell and keeping an eye open for possible visitors to the monastery. Patrick the son of Calpurn that had set the country a-fire with Christianity, Patrick of the Miracles was staying in one of the wattled cells. Great lords and chiefs and people of importance came at all hours of the day seeking to talk with Patrick. " It's little enough time they leave him for prayer itself," muttered Benedictus, glancing at the small stone church where Patrick was at that moment. " It's a pity for him to be tormented the way he is — Virgin of Heaven, here comes a pack of them! " There was a rumor of voices, a padding of feet, and a small crowd of men and boys approached at a run. Benedictus barred the entrance.

" The blessing of the Son of God upon you," he said, " what brings you hither? "

" A miracle," cried the spokesman of the crowd, a burly brown-faced peasant, " a wonder that has happened in the light of day! 'Tis but a little while ago that we were busy — Flann, Ernan, Brian, Hugh, and myself — striving to lift the great pillar-stone that fell yestereve across the chariot-road: we were bending our strength to rive it from the pavement with stout ash-poles when we heard the clattering and jingling — the hoof-beats as it were of a cavalcade coming out of nowhere upon us. We scarce had time to lift an eyelid when close on us — a-top of us, you might say — was a monstrous horse, white as a snow mountain, and a man astride of him, giant-big, and shining like the sun — I give you my word his hair was like the golden vessels Patrick has: and his beard as bright a color. The hoof-beats of the horse would shake a continent! The rider drew him in, with his mane like a cloud about him, and watched us riving at the stone — do our best we could not budge it a hair's breadth! And the rider on the great horse watching us: you'd think it was some Mighty Angel out of Heaven that never saw men sweat at a piece of work the way he watched us — and we heart-scalded with the dint of our striving! At last he lets a groan out of him: 'My grief,' says he, 'that the world should have dwindled to such weaklings! A young lad could have lifted this in days I knew of!' and stooping on his horse's neck he lifted the stone with one hand! A great sight entirely it was to see him, all shining there on the shining horse."

" It is a Demon that he was," cried Benedictus, " or a Prince of the Powers of the Air, or a Wicked Enchanter! "

" You are in the right of it," said the man, " a Demon he was surely: for, look you, the saddle-girths broke as he

stooped to the stone, and he came with one foot to the ground — it is likely that Patrick blessed that road: for, when the Enchanter touched it, the fine shape fell away from him and he was naught but an old, old man in rags and tatters and wisps of grayness! "

" It is indeed a Miracle," said Benedictus, " and a Marvellous Happening." He crossed himself.

" We would tell Patrick of it," said the man, " for that purpose we ran before the others. We would see Patrick the Saint."

" Patrick is at his prayers," said Benedictus, " no one may see him till he comes forth."

" But they are bringing the Demon to him in his shape of an old, old man. An old man blind with age! They would have Patrick exorcise him. All the folk are coming hither with him! "

" Have ye the horse too? " asked Benedictus.

" Alas, no! the horse reared himself in the air: and went his ways, invisible as wind! "

" There are tales of such horses in old books," said Benedictus. " I would I had set eyes upon him."

" You will set eyes on the Demon that rode him, if that is your pleasure, for see the folk are bringing him. Ernan and Hugh are supporting him on one side, and the two sons of Rossa on the other."

Benedictus could indeed see a bent and gray-haired old man of great stature led and supported by a crowd that jostled about him. He thought it time to go for Patrick, and took his news into the little stone church. So it came to pass that when the second crowd joined its forerunners at the entrance to the monastery it found the Saint with brothers Aidan and Malachy.

"The blessing of the God of Peace be upon you, my children," said Patrick, his eyes measuring the stature and feebleness of the strange man.

At the sound of Patrick's voice the old man thrust forward his head and trembling hands.

"I would speak with one in authority," he said, "is there a king's son, or a poet, or a druid here?"

"I am a druid of the One God," said Patrick, "speak to me."

"I am Usheen, the son of Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Trenmor, the son of Bassna," said the old man.

"It is a name out of ancient books," said Brother Malachy, "there are tales of Fionn that was chief of the Fianna once."

"It is a Shape-Changer that he is, an Enchanter, an Evil Magician," shouted voices in the crowd.

"My children," said Patrick, "this is a thing to be inquired into. I will keep this man and question him. Do ye forthwith return to your fields and to your homes."

The crowd melted away, and the strange old man was brought through the entrance and across the palisaded dyke which sheltered the group of wattled huts and the small stone church of the monastery. There was room in the enclosure for a green lawn and one oak tree: a bundle of sweet-smelling rushes was heaped at the foot of the tree, and the old man was guided to it that he might sit there.

"Rest your shoulders against the oak-trunk," said Patrick. "You must taste of our food and drink: and when your weariness is spent, I would hear from you the tale of the strange happening."

"I will be thankful for food and drink," said the old

man, " I have not broken bread or drunken wine or water since I came again to this land."

Food was brought to him; and when he had rested, Patrick came with the brothers of the monastery and said:

" We have here a scribe that he may write of this wonder for the people that will come after us. Are you in truth Usheen, the poet, the son of Fionn: are you in truth of the Fianna that lorded it so long ago in Ireland — in ancient times scarce remembered? "

" I am indeed of the Fianna, and once this country knew us: we thought the story of us would go sounding down the years. My grief! it is dust we are before the wind! "

" You were to tell us of your coming hither on the white horse," said Patrick.

" I must first tell of my going hence," said Usheen. " We were together, Fionn, and Keeltya, and Goll, and Oscar, and myself on the White Strand that is smooth and hard for the racing of horses. It was quiet there and lonesome, with the evening colors stealing into the sky. We had turned towards the warmth of the meadows when there came a great surge of music from the sea; music that had crashing bells in it, and laughter of harp-strings, and all sweet voices mingled in song. We stood where the sound caught us — listening.

" The sea foamed in, and through the waves of it there came a queen of faery riding upon a pearl-white horse that had nine apples of gold tied in his plaited mane. There was never any queen so beautiful — she was fairer than the first blossoms of spring!

" She cried on me by name: ' Usheen son of Fionn, Usheen proud maker of songs! ' I had no voice to answer her. ' Usheen,' she said, ' my heart was heavy dream-

ing of you in Teer-nan-ogue; for you have taken it in the slumbrous sweetness of your songs. Have you not ever wearied for a sight of me? I am Unwithering Beauty; I am Nee-av the Sea-King's daughter. Come with me, come with me! Leave the lagging burdensome hours and the wan unchanging sunlight. Life has a thousand colors. Singer of lasting songs, come with me, come with me, Usheen!'

"There was neither country nor kin for me that heard her voice; nor land nor sea nor moon nor stars. I moved to her: a swift wave lifted me, and we sped together, wind-light, over the curving foam-bright crests of the sea.

"Beneath us were lilied meadows, ruby-flowered and golden, and trees globed with fruits amber and honey-rinded: strange beasts moved amongst the flowers and trees there langorously: pards silver-spotted; and kyeleens; with phoenix-birds, and unicorns that were colored like the moon. Palaces glittered by us, domed and silent, held fast in sleep of enchantment: their towers peacocked and empanoplied with banners that no wind stirred ever. We saw a red hind, close by us, curved in its leaping: with a white hound that followed. We saw the long loose tresses of the sea-folk tossing in wave-hollows that were lazuli and malachite: their wan faces looked out on us — looked out with laughter.

"But how shall I tell of Teer-nan-ogue — that had every color of beauty in it and every heart-beat of joy — the Many Colored Land, the Country of the Ever-Young? I dwelt there — a thing too great for a mortal — and because a country that had darkness and tempest reared me, thoughts would come to me of gray skies and rain-lashed wind-stripped trees; and of Fionn's house, the white palace

of Aloon with the candles lighted there and the doors barred against the night: and all the Fellowship of the Fianna shut warm within. I would think of Diarmid, that had such blytheness of heart, and the stories he would listen to: and how the Boar of Ben Gulban killed him in the end. I would grow hungry for the sight of Oscar my own son; I would be hungry for the battle-shout of Fionn, and the clash of sword on war-gear. And all this longing grew on me: and I could not hide it.

" Then Nee-av said: ' Your heart is like a sea-bird that hears the beat of the surge, and would have the salt wind in its pinions, and the crashing spray. Tell me what thing it is that you desire.' ' A sight of Fionn,' I answered, ' and a sight of the comrades of my youth! ' ' Alas,' she said, ' they are quiet dust these many centuries; their names are scarce remembered; strangers look dry-eyed on the ruins of their palaces, and on their heaped-up cairns.' ' You jest,' cried I, ' for I have seen the seasons wax and wane but these three years in the Country of the Ever-Young with you! ' ' It is three years,' she said, ' in Teer-nan-ogue: it is three centuries and more as men count time! '

" I knew then that I could never see the face of any comrade; but it brought me no content. I had a bitter longing to see the hills and stony places of Ireland: it went deeper in me than the first longing, but I was ashamed to speak it. I said: ' I would see the graves of Oscar and of Fionn. I would lay a stone upon the cairn that covers Keeltya, and a stone upon the cairn of Lewy's Son.' ' Alas,' said Nee-av, ' you will not be contented till you have felt how lean and poor and naked the earth-days are; how cold the sunshine lies there; how brittle and how bitter is the dust! Go then: the bright white steed will bear you light as sea-foam,

light as a bird's feather, over land and wave. But do not dismount from him, for if you set a foot upon the earth the weight of all the years will fall on you — the prisoning heavy weight — and never more will I have sight of you: and never more will you see Teer-nan-ogue.'

" Lo, as she spoke the white horse stood by me all eager to be gone. I mounted him and cried my last farewell to Nee-av: and we sped, wind-light, through the foam and clangor of enchanted seas, and by far shining lands, till we came again to the dove-gray beaches and to the cloud-shadowed mountains of Ireland.

" My grief! the folk I loved were gone from it! Nowhere could I see any man of stature like myself: nowhere could I get tidings of Fionn. His palace of Aloon no longer fronted the sun. The hill that made a brag of it had grown to a forgetfulness; had not even kept a scar of loss — and everywhere the light lay coldly and the winds held a sound of lamentation. ' I will go back,' I said, ' to Teer-nan-ogue where joy is like a fountain; where every morrow is more glorious than the day that set. I will go back to Nee-av. She has gathered now the world's last beauty to herself: she that is fairer than fair things remembered.'

" Would that I had hastened as the eager horse was fain to. But I forced him to go slowly that I might look the longer on streams that I knew, and on valleys where I had hunted. My eyes were fain of those places. I had joy in blood-red mosses patched upon the bog-lands and the blueness of lakes. I was glad of long lush meadows slanting to rivers. They were thickly set with the blossomed stems of the flag-lily shining golden-yellow in the sun, and bees droning there made a sound of summer. I was glad

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of the slow-moving waters of the Boyne singing among their tasselled reeds. I had ears for the voice of the lark — I that had heard the Birds of Angus in Teer-nan-ogue.

" And so, loitering, I came upon the chariot-road; and upon the fallen pillar-stone, and the handful of puny ill-shaped men that were striving to raise it. The rest of my story is known to you."

" All things happen by the will of God," said Patrick, " you have been sent amongst us that we may learn the manner of life this island had in times past, and that you may learn of us. I will tell you of the true God."

" Tell me of Fionn," said Usheen, " if one of you has any news of him! "

" I had songs and stories of him in my youth," said Brother Malachy, " and of Diarmid too; and Cunnaun, and Oscar."

" If you could think of one of them now," said Patrick, " it would be a comfort to this man, broken and afflicted as he is."

" My grief, the rhymes and assonances and twists of the verse are gone from me! I had ' *The Battle of the White Strand* ' once by heart — a great tale it was: about a hard long-drawn-out battle that Fionn fought there, and the Fianna of Ireland along with him, against the champions and kings of the world; with the waves crashing round their feet and the tides dragging the dead and living into the depths. I have not the words of it now: it is a long tale! But Fionn broke the battle on the kings from over-sea, and it was his champions that staggered out with the victory.

" I had the story of the Battle of Gowra too, where the great Fellowship came to its end fighting against the High

King of Ireland: it is a story of laments and the bringing down of proud heads, and the wearing away of greatness. There is a lament that Fionn made when he saw Oscar that was dying, with his white body covered with wounds:

> *'My luck goes in your going, Oscar,*
> *Proud Oscar —'"*

"Stop," cried Usheen, "do not say the words of that lament. I am too old now to weep for Oscar my own son. A strong man of his hands was Oscar — age did not dry the strength in him — he had the keening of a warrior: let that be said.

"Did Fionn get death in the battle?"

"It is not told that Fionn got death anywhere. They say he was kin to gods that used to be worshipped long ago, and went back to them: and indeed a queer thing happened to a lad that was comrade of mine when I was a lad myself, without thought or knowledge of the true God. He found a cave in a hillside one day and went into it. Farther and farther he went in till he came to a great hall that had stone seats and recesses in it. Warriors, bearded and huge-limbed — the like of the giants old men would be talking of — sat on the seats: sunken all of them in slumber. On the royal seat — that was carved with figures of the sun and moon and charms and ships and old forgotten things — sat one that had the aspect of a king or a high noble champion that singers would praise. If the others were big-limbed, he bettered them in stature and girth. He was bearded like them, and the same sleep held him bound to his place. It is likely that he heartened many a battle: for his armor, that had running hounds and dragons let into it with gold, was dinted with weapon-

marks. The battle-cap on his head was of some old white handsome metal that Mannus never heard-tell of even. A big green stone, more green than a Spring meadow, made a brightness in the front of it; and under the cap his hair was of two colors: every lock of it gold, as yellow as the blossom of the flag-iris, and silver at the tips like a moon-flame. He had a naked sword across his knees with great studs of gold in its outlandish hilt — "

"That was Fionn," cried Usheen, "he had silver in every lock of his hair since the day that the Woman of the Lake put enchantment on him: his sword was hilted with a sea-beast's tooth — my grief that I was not the one to find the cave!"

"It's little good the finding of it did to Mannus. He got his death by a wild bull within the year — one of the big white bulls with curved horns that go crashing through waste places and mountain-forests — and never reached to manhood: he that was strong and lusty of life!"

"Keep to the story of the cave," said Patrick. "What happened there?"

"Mannus stood there, staring his fill, and the great kings sat there without a sound or stir: and except that they had the color and freshness of life, they might have been dead men for a thousand years; or since the beginning of time! Mannus fell to fingering their armor and touching their sword-scabbards that were wrought with running hounds in red and white bronze. There was a horn of bronze that had fallen by the foot-rest of the royal seat, and Mannus lifted it. It was so heavy that he could scarce hold it in both his hands; he set it to his lips, and a low thundering note came from it. The kings started from their sleep and cried: 'Fionn, Son of Uail, has the time come?' The great

king in the royal seat opened his eyes and looked at Mannus. 'The time is not yet,' he said. At that the others sank their heads and slept: but still the great king looked at Mannus. His eyes were like blue flame: and great fear came on Mannus so that he covered his face with his hands and ran from the hall, stumbling till he came to the mouth of the cave.

"He stumbled into the sunlight and fell flat. He lay for a long time — fear had sucked the strength from him — and when he came to himself he looked to find the mouth of the cave. It was gone. There was not the slightest crack or crevice of it! He searched the whole side of the hill: and many a one, on his tale of it, has searched it since. But never a soul of them got sight or tidings of the cave."

"O blackness of misfortune," cried Usheen, "that I am old and blind: I would search Ireland for the cave, were I not halt; and spent; and without eyes to see it!"

"My son," said Patrick, "it is vain to trust in the strength of youth; or of manhood: they are but as grass or flowering reeds that flourish in the morning and at evening are cut down. Stay with us. You will have rest and shelter and leave to talk of the Fianna, for we would have our scribe write the tales of them: and as for you there are many things of which you are ignorant —"

"One thing I know," cried Usheen, "Fionn is alive! Some day his battle-shout will make a gladness in the hills and in the hearts of men. It is little to me now, the thought of food or shelter. I am not concerned for what sparse tedious years will drag themselves over my head: nor piled-up years nor hours have further hurt that they can do to me! I am gray ash and blackened ember of the fire that was Usheen once: what stories I can tell will

be but as the whisper of the wind where once the red flame sang against the stars — be it as you will! "

And so it came to pass that Usheen abode in the quiet monastery: and the monks talked with him, and the scribe wrote down the stories that he had: and Patrick argued with him — and we that have the tales are thankful.

WITHDRAWN FOR DISCARD

WORDS

THAT MAY PUZZLE THE READER

Words	*Pronounced*	*Meaning*
Balor	Ballor	The God of Death and Darkness.
barth		A bundle.
bodach	bodd-ach	A surly miserly person who may have amassed wealth but is of low rank.
bog		A soft marshy place of peat soil.
Brugh of Angus	broo	The Royal Palace of Angus, now known as the Cave of Newgrange.
Dahna (Dana)		The Great Goddess, the Mother of the Gods.
dune		The fortified house of a king or chief.
Fianna	Fee-anna	A fellowship of warriors pledged to defend Ireland.
findruiney	finned-rinny	A white metal prized more than gold by the ancient Gael: probably a white bronze.
Fionn	Finn	White or Beautiful.
keening		Lamenting.
Lugh	Loo	The Keltic Sun-God.
Moy-Mell		The Honey-Plain, one of the Keltic Other-Worlds.
piast	peeast	A mythical serpent inhabiting lakes and whirlpools.
Teer-nan-ogue (Tir-nan-oge)		The Country of the Ever-Young, one of the magical Keltic Other-Worlds.
tussock		A dry standing-ground of earth and heather in a bog.
Uail	Oo-al	The father of Fionn.

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